

*Windows to the Polemics against the So-Called Jews and  
Jezebel In Revelation: Insights from Historical and  
Co(n)textual Analysis*

by

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## Abstract

The thesis mainly studies social-historical co(n)texts to understand the polemic in Revelation against the so-called ‘Jews’ and a self-professed prophetess named ‘Jezebel’ (Rev 2-3). The enquiry centres on two areas: (1) the underlying issues to the polemic against the above-named contenders, and (2) a reading of a polemical technique in the text against prophetess ‘Jezebel’ through a specific web of associations involving two ‘Jezebels’ and a great harlot.

Preliminary studies provide the framework for the main enquiry. ‘Historical anchorage’ is attained in the echoes/allusions of the beast from the sea-abyss to emperor Titus (Ch. 2) and the ‘Satanic trio’ and their cult (Rev 13) to the Flavian dynasty and cult (Ch. 3). A real crisis for Christians is seen late in Domitian’s time involving pressure from the Flavian provincial temple, widespread false accusations of ἀθεότης, ἀσέβεια or *maiestas* and pressures from Domitian’s rigorous exaction of the Jewish tax. These matters are seen to implicate both Jewish and Gentile Christians (Ch. 4). The figure of the beasts, the social pressure from the imperial cult, and the vulnerability of Christians reflected in these preliminary studies contribute to a fuller understanding of the anti-Judaistic polemic. There are reasons to think that the anti-Judaistic polemic in Rev 2:9-10 and 3:9 is not aimed at the Jewish community *per se*, but acts to discourage Christians from feigning affiliation with the synagogue to escape social pressure from the imperial cult. There is a growing importance of the imperial cult towards the end of the first century C.E. in Asia Minor, and a judaizing tendency among some Christians there late first century and beyond. Importantly, Rev 14:9-11 reflects the author’s major concern about (1) participation in the imperial cult and (2) Christian ‘judaizing’ behaviour (the mark of beast as tefillin worn by outsiders to Rabbinic Judaism). Under the author’s creative hand, the beast from the land/false prophet becomes the ‘Satanic’ source of pressure to these two aspects (cf. 13:11-17; Ch. 5).

The second major part demonstrates a polemical technique in the text that binds the prophetess ‘Jezebel’ with an OT Queen and the Great Harlot (Rev 17-18). Social meals with drinking parties in guilds/associations and the imperial cult could have been a common context for allurements to sexual immorality and eating idol-food that ‘Jezebel’ advocates. I construct a picture of the prophetess ‘Jezebel’, who perhaps doubles as a patroness of a trade guild incorporating members from the Thyatiran church. Pagan ‘mysteries’ could have been a part of her activities (Ch. 6). I also examine the Great Harlot within the Graeco-Roman context giving attention to her depiction as tyrannical and sexually immoral queens and assimilated goddesses, such as Isis, Cybele, Aphrodite and Roma (Ch. 7). The OT Queen Jezebel is also studied within her social-historical context. She is seen to take on the image of the ‘woman at the window’ (2 Kgs 9:30), reflective of goddess Astarte or her temple servant. Her role as the ‘גְּבִיָּרָה’ (great lady; 2 Kgs 10:13) and queen mother also fits that of another goddess, Asherah, whose prophets she hosts (Ch. 8). The destruction of Queen Jezebel and that of the Great Harlot contain a polemic against pagan deities they both embody. The prophetess veering into pagan grounds of idolatry is bound tightly with them and is indirectly castigated for her syncretistic practices (Ch. 9).

Overall, the author’s polemic in Revelation acts to deter Christians from veering into the grounds of ‘Satan’—the imperial cult and the synagogue (as the author puts it)—and against behaviours, such as sexual license and eating food offered to idols, that would allow Christians to easily enter contexts involving pagan worship.

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*Dedicated to Kwang-San, whose sacrifice has made this work possible.*

### Declaration of Original Work

This thesis is the result of original research.  
Sources of materials used are acknowledged fully.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
ABRL	Anchor Bible Reference Library
ACS	American Classical Studies
AJP	<i>American Journal of Philology</i>
AJSR	<i>Association for Jewish Studies Review</i>
AJT	<i>American Journal of Theology</i>
ANE	Ancient Near East
ANF	<i>The Ante-Nicene Fathers</i>
ANRW	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt</i>
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
BAR	<i>Biblical Archaeology Review</i>
BASOR	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary of the New Testament
Bib.	<i>Biblica</i>
BibInt	<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>
BJS	Brown Judaic Studies
BMC	<i>Coins of the Roman Empire in the British Museum</i>
BO	<i>Bibliotheca orientalis</i>
NewPauly	<i>Brill's New Pauly</i> . Eds. Hubert and Schneider
BZNW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche
CBET	Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CCCA	<i>Corpus cultus Cybelae Attidisque</i> . Ed. Vermaseren
CH	<i>Church History</i>
CIG	<i>Corpus inscriptionum graecarum</i> . Ed. A. Boeckh.
CIL	<i>Corpus inscriptionum latinarum</i> . Mommsen et al.
CJ	<i>Classical Journal</i>
CNP	<i>Corpus Nummorum Palaestinensium</i> . Ed. Kadman.
CP	<i>Classical Philology</i>
CPJ	<i>Corpus papyrorum judaicarum</i> .
CQ	<i>Classical Quarterly</i>
CTA	<i>Corpus des tablettes en cunéiformes alphabétiques découvertes à Ras Shamra-Ugarit de 1929 à 1963</i>
CurTM	<i>Currents in Theology and Mission</i>
DDD	<i>Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible</i>
EphEp	<i>Ephemeris epigraphica: Corporis inscriptionum Latinarum supplementum</i>
EPRO	Études Préliminaires aux Religions Orientales dans L'Empire Romain
ESEC	Emory Studies in Early Christianity
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
GCS	Die griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhunderte
GR	<i>Greece and Rome</i>

HDR	Harvard Dissertations in Religion
HSCP	<i>Harvard Studies in Classical Philology</i>
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
HTS	<i>Harvard Theological Studies</i>
IAssos	<i>Die Inschriften von Assos</i> . Ed. Merkelbach
ICC	International Critical Commentary
IDélos	<i>Inscriptions de Délos: Décrets postérieurs à 166 av. J-C (nos. 1497-1524)</i> . Ed. Roussel and Launey
IEJ	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>
IEphesos	<i>Die Inschriften von Ephesos</i> . Eds. Engelmann et al.
IGBulg	<i>Inscriptiones graecae in Bulgaria repertae</i> . Ed. Mihailov.
IPergamon	<i>Die Inschriften von Pergamon</i> . Ed. Fabricius and Schuchhardt.
IPergamonAsklep	<i>Die Inschriften des Asklepieions</i> . Ed. Habicht.
IGRom	<i>Inscriptiones graecae ad res romanas pertinentes</i> . Ed. Cagnat.
ISardBR	<i>Sardis. Publications of the American Society for the Excavation of Sardis</i> . Ed. Buckler and Robinson
ISmyrna	Georg Petzl, <i>Inschriften von Smyrna</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JEA	<i>Journal of Egyptian Archaeology</i>
JECS	<i>Journal of Early Christian Studies</i>
JETS	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
JHS	<i>Journal of Hellenic Studies</i>
JNES	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
JQR	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
JRS	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
JSJ	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Periods</i>
JSNT	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament: Supplement Series
JSOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series
JSP	<i>Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha</i>
JSSEA	<i>Journal of the Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities</i>
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
KAI	<i>Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften</i> . Eds. Donner and Röllig.
KTU	<i>Die keilalphabetische Texte aus Ugarit</i> . Eds. Dietrich et al.
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LSJ	<i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i> . Liddell et al.
LNTS	Library of New Testament Studies
NEncyBrit	<i>New Encyclopaedia Britannica, The</i>
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIGTC	<i>New International Greek Testament Commentary</i>
NovT	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NovTSup	<i>Supplements to Novum Testamentum</i>
NPNF	The Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers
NTS	<i>New Testament Studies</i>

OTS	Old Testament Studies
PTA	Papyrologische Texte und Abhandlungen
PTMS	Princeton Theological Monograph Series
<i>RelEd</i>	<i>Religious Education</i>
RGRW	Religions in the Graeco-Roman World
<i>RIC</i>	<i>The Roman Imperial Coinage</i> . Ed. Mattingly et al.
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
<i>SBLSP</i>	<i>Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers</i>
SBLSymS	Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series
SCJ	Studies in Christianity and Judaism
<i>SIG</i>	<i>Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum</i>
<i>SIRIS</i>	<i>Sylloge inscriptionum religionis Isiacae et Sarapiacae</i> . Ed. Vidman
SJLA	Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
<i>SPhilo</i>	<i>Studia Philonica Annual: Studies in Hellenistic Judaism</i>
<i>SR</i>	<i>Studies in Religion</i>
StABH	Studies in American Biblical Hermeneutics
StPB	Studia post-biblica
STR	Studies in Theology and Religion
<i>TAM</i>	<i>Tituli Asiae Minoris</i>
<i>TAPA</i>	<i>Transactions of the American Philological Association</i>
<i>TAPhA</i>	<i>Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association</i>
<i>TDNT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> . Eds. Kittel et al.
<i>TDOT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> . Eds. Botterweck et al.
TSAJ	Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
<i>UF</i>	<i>Ugarit Forschungen</i>
<i>VC</i>	<i>Vigiliae christianae</i>
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
<i>WUNT</i>	<i>Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament</i>

## ***PART ONE: ON THE PRELIMINARIES***

### **Chapter One: Introduction to Thesis**

Religion is an area in which polemical discourses have led to tragic situations. Religious polemic is disturbing and often has long term consequences. The Bible is, unfortunately, not devoid of polemical content. In fact, a large part of the biblical texts appears less then irenic in tone. Old Testament prophets are depicted as often engaged in explicit polemic against the apostate people of God. The Gospels often contain episodes of violent speech against the Pharisees and scribes. Polemic, and sometimes a very severe kind, is the focus of anti-Jewish/Judaistic writings of church fathers throughout the centuries. In the book of Revelation, we also see polemical tone in a number of depictions. For example, in the visionary narrative (i.e., chs. 4-22), we see a great harlot pejoratively called ‘mother of prostitutes and the abominations of the earth’ (ἡ μήτηρ τῶν πορνῶν καὶ τῶν βδελυγμάτων; 17:5). Her destruction lies at the penultimate climax of the book, and brings about much rejoicing (19:1-2). In the so-called ‘letters’ (chs. 2-3), we see the author’s polemic in Rev 2-3 against a prophetess ‘Jezebel’, the ‘Jews’, their synagogue, and against wayward church members.

#### ***1. The Polemic in Revelation under Study***

The study of polemic in this thesis centres on these two prominent ‘camps’ of people in the ‘letters’.

- (1) There are some who claim to be Jews but whose Jewish identity the author denies. They are further criticized as members of the ‘synagogue of Satan’ (συναγωγὴ τοῦ σατανᾶ). Some form of tension between them and the churches of Smyrna and Philadelphia is noted (2:9-10; 3:9).
- (2) ‘Jezebel’, her followers and groups like the Nicolaitans, and followers of Balaam’s teaching (2:20-25 and 2:6, 14-16) fall into a loose movement accused of sexual license and eating food offered to idols. The focus will particularly be on ‘Jezebel’ since she is the only leader in the movement to be confronted directly by the author (2:21). ‘Jezebel’ is also named after a notorious OT queen known for idolatry and harlotries (2 Kgs 9:22). She and her followers are threatened with great suffering and death (Rev 2:22-23). In

contrast, only Balaam's teaching is mentioned, while the Nicolaitans are mentioned briefly (2:6, 15).

The objective of the thesis is to understand the context of the polemic against the above-named contenders, specifically the so-called Jews and the prophetess 'Jezebel', and to demonstrate a specific reading of a polemical strategy against the latter that lies inherent in the text.

'Polemic' is becoming a common or even fanciful term—shall I say—a term becoming in vogue. A reading of studies on the NT and Christian origins reveals the term 'polemic' to be frequently used, but many a time without a definition.<sup>1</sup> This is understandable since the term commonly conjures rightly an impression of an extensive attack using words against one's opponents in the context of a conflict or controversy. The *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* defines of 'polemic' to mean 'a strong verbal or written attack', and 'polemics' to mean 'the art or practice of engaging in controversial debate or dispute'.<sup>2</sup> Rokeah wishes to maintain a finer distinction between 'polemic' and 'dispute' or 'debate' in his study of Jewish, Christian and pagan relations. He defines 'polemic' as 'a campaign or conflict haveing [sic] the aim of changing an opponent's views of his religion'.<sup>3</sup> But as it turns out, the polemic reflected in Revelation is more inward looking, not so much in 'changing' the contender's view but regulating behaviour that is within the churches. These definitions point out in common that polemic is a strong attack using words against a contender or a contending view. The *Brill Dictionary of Religion* provides a description of 'polemics' to involve

a rhetorical 'attack strategy' for quarreling: *polemics* (Gk., *polemiké téchne*), identified by irrelevantly aggressive, but overpoweringly argumentational, discourse. Its intent is the annihilation of the opponent's position, or even of his or her person. Thus its address is to an audience that offers evaluation but that can be fictitious, as well.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> E.g., Rodney A. Whitacre, *Johannine Polemic: The Role of Tradition and Theology* (SBL Dissertation Series 67; Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1980); Alexandra Cuffel, *Gendering Disgust in Medieval Religious Polemic* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson (eds.), *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* (11 ed, revised; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 1109.

<sup>3</sup> David Rokeah, *Jews, Pagans and Christians in Conflict* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1982), 9.

<sup>4</sup> Achim Hack, 'Polemics', in Kocku von Stuckrad (ed.) *The Brill Dictionary of Religion* (vol. III; Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2006), 1464-65, see 1464.

I adopt Brill's definition but with certain qualifications. One qualification to this definition for the study of the book of Revelation is that polemical delivery need not only take the form of an 'argumentational' discourse, even though this is a form of polemical delivery present in the 'letters' of Revelation (e.g. 2:14-16; 2:20-23). Polemical delivery can be couched in the form of vision-report with its accompanying derogatory associations to the images therein (more below). The second qualification would be that polemics need not be for the annihilation of one's enemies. Maijastina Kahlos sees the 'refuting and annihilation of opponents' as part of polemic. But equally he writes of the aim of 'the reinforcement of identity and restoration of discipline inside the Christian community'.<sup>5</sup> We will see in this thesis that the restoration of discipline in a Christian community is a major aim of the polemic, not the annihilation of one's opponents. One does not see the 'annihilation of opponents' as an aim of the polemic against 'Jezebel' and the so-called 'Jews'. Only figuratively, 'Jezebel' is seen to be associated with characters who are destroyed, namely Queen Jezebel (Kgs 9:30-37) and the Great Harlot (Rev 17-18)<sup>6</sup>. The deviant stance of 'Jezebel' is denounced (2:20, 24), and both she and her followers are severely warned (2:22). This subtle attack of derogatory association serves an ethical purpose of keeping church members from what the false prophetess espouses. Differently, the so-called Jews, though vilified with a derogatory name, are not depicted as destroyed. Some are even depicted as acknowledging their fault (3:9). So polemics can take on different shapes depending on its kind, and the situation involved.

As mentioned, apart from polemic the form of an argumentational discourse, indirect polemic in the form of a vision report is also possible. Such a polemic couched in an unconventional form is *subtle*, yet powerful, once the message gets across. For instance, I show that John's prophetic contender, 'Jezebel', is associated in a subtle way with both a notorious queen and a great harlot, the latter appearing in a vision. Edith Humphrey explores the rhetoric or polemic inherent in vision-reports. Particularly eye-catching is her introduction entitled 'Vision-Report as Artifact and Polemic'.<sup>7</sup> The many suggestions of rhetorical/polemical points in the sections of

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<sup>5</sup> Maijastina Kahlos, *Debate and Dialogue: Christian and Pagan Cultures c.360-430* (Ashgate New Critical Thinking in Religion, Theology and Biblical Studies; Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2007), 63.

<sup>6</sup> See ch. 9 of thesis.

<sup>7</sup> Edith M. Humphrey, *And I Turned to See the Voice: The Rhetoric of Vision in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.; Baker Academic, 2007), 15-30.

Revelation (her chapter four) appear diffused, and are not particularly rooted in understanding of the polemical context. Nonetheless the title of the chapter, ‘Firing the Imagination: Visions with Embedded Propositions’,<sup>8</sup> does justice to the multi-valence of vision-reports.<sup>9</sup> While equally acceding to polyvalence in Revelation’s images, I explore the polemic in a holistic manner by giving attention to the socio-historical circumstances triggering the polemic at hand (especially Part Two: On the polemic against the so-called ‘Jews’), and offer a reading of a very specific polemical strategy (in Part Three: On the polemic against ‘Jezebel’).

As with others, Christopher Leighton writes, ‘The term *polemics* generally denotes the art of controversy and disputation’. I want to draw the attention to what he further ascribes to it:

Polemical discourse is more often than not speech animated by anger and fear. It deploys explosive language that compels the listener to take a stand. Religious polemics are frequently used to combat opposing interpretations of truth. Polemics serve to demarcate and fortify the boundaries between “insiders” and “outsiders,” offering protection from contact with the carriers of “sin and unbelief”.<sup>10</sup>

His finer observations on religious polemics as a way to strengthen a community’s ethical boundary are largely reflective of the kind in Revelation. We shall see that the polemic against the Jews and ‘Jezebel’ stems from a concern (or fear) that church members will be led to deviant behaviours of various kinds. Explosive language that ‘*compels the listener to take a stand*’ (in Leighton’s words) occurs in Revelation. Likewise, the contending groups are relegated to the camp of Satan (2:9; 3:9; 2:24) — the obnoxious adversary — together with injunctions to ‘hear’ the message (e.g. 2:11 and 3:11). I propose in this thesis, that such bad-naming of the synagogue acts as an indirect message to dissuade Jesus-followers from affiliating with the Judaistic community as a cover (protection) for their Christian faith. It is so observed that the religious polemic in Revelation addresses primarily an inner-church affair and it is

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<sup>8</sup> Humphrey, 151-94.

<sup>9</sup> Humphrey, 28-29.

<sup>10</sup> Christopher M. Leighton, ‘Contending with a Polemical Tradition: The Rhetorical Art of Christian Self-Definition’, *RelEd* 91 (1996): 529-38, see 531. For other studies dealing with religious polemics, see J. A. M. Snoek, ‘An annotated bibliography’, in Hettema and van der Kooij (eds.), *Religious Polemics in Context: Papers presented to the Second International Conference of the Leiden Institute for the Study of Religions (Lisor) held at Leiden, 27-28 April, 2000* (Assen, Amsterdam: Royal van Gorcum, 2004), 507-88.

meant to fortify boundaries and regulate what constitutes appropriate Christian behaviour (ch. 10, §2). The aim of the text of Revelation is not so much a direct confrontation with the so-called ‘Jews’ and ‘Jezebel’. The author refers to them in the third person. Prior to the text a confrontation with ‘Jezebel’ probably occurred, but not in the text (2:21). The polemic in the text fits what M. Dascal observes as a kind in which ‘there is no real dialogue’.<sup>11</sup> Instead, the general members of the churches were the main recipients of the polemical message. The message concerns them more than ‘Jezebel’ or the so-called ‘Jews’. The real recipients of the polemical message are, as in de Kruijf’s idea, ‘hidden’. These were the Christians lax in their ethical boundaries.<sup>12</sup> Despite the intense polemic in Revelation against the so-called Jews and prophetess ‘Jezebel’, only few studies have focused on them. The complexity involved in understanding an indirect polemic with its underlying issues may be one reason for this.

Some books on or fringing on polemics in Revelation deserve mention. In an insightful study, Greg Carey situates his discussion of polemic in the realm of rhetorical criticism.<sup>13</sup> He gathers the various means John uses to strengthen his authority over and against a range of opponents, who are in his terms, ‘individual, institutional, and corporate’, such as ‘Christian preachers and their followers, Jewish communities, the Empire and its partners, and humanity in general’.<sup>14</sup> As one can see, he takes a general approach and does not particularly distinguish among the polemics against the various opponents. The technique of polemical rhetoric he studies consists of a deliberate portrayal of oneself in a positive way, and that of various opponents negatively. As he states, his focus is on ‘John’s rhetoric rather than on his historical context’.<sup>15</sup> What I offer is a more focused look at the polemic against specific ‘opponents’, and a conception of the social-historical factors involved. Exceptionally well-argued, Paul Duff’s study centres on a technique of

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<sup>11</sup> G. G. de Kruijf, ‘A Response to H. J. de Jonge: The Case of the Revelation of John versus the Imperial Cult’, in Hettema and van der Kooij (eds.), 291-93, see 291; cf. Marcelo Dascal, ‘Types of Polemics and Types of Polemical Moves’, in Svetla Cmejrkova et al (eds.), *Dialogue Analysis VI, Proceedings of the 6th Conference, Prague 1996*, vol. 1 (Tubingen: Max Niemeyer, 1998), 15-33.

<sup>12</sup> De Kruijf, 292-93.

<sup>13</sup> Greg Carey, *Elusive Apocalypse: Reading Authority in the Revelation of John* (StABH 15; Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1999), 93.

<sup>14</sup> Carey, 135.

<sup>15</sup> Carey, 137.



innuendo against the prophetess ‘Jezebel’. This technique he identifies consists of intratextual associations forming a web of interrelationships among the characters in Revelation, and the use of some gender stereotyping.<sup>16</sup> I contribute in Part Three another web of derogatory association, not explored by Duff, that has an intertextual dimension. This dimension involves an OT queen, ‘Jezebel’. Anti-Jezebel polemic has not received as much attention as has anti-imperial rhetoric.<sup>17</sup> The imperial cult has commonly been considered a factor contributing to various degrees to an anti-imperial polemic.<sup>18</sup> While accepting this, this thesis considers the imperial cult also as a factor in an anti-Judaistic rhetoric. In my reconstruction, the pressure from the imperial cult becomes a source of stress for Christians, which in turn spurs some to feign affiliation with the synagogue, as a way out of social pressures to participate in the imperial cult.

In an article, Peder Borgen performs a similar study of trying to make sense of the polemic against the so-called Jews,<sup>19</sup> as I do in Part Three. He interprets the polemic also as an intramural kind. He sees the conflict between the church (ἐκκλησία) and the synagogue as an important factor. The intramural nature of the polemic stems from his situating the church in the Jewish realm. Borgen presents a larger role of the synagogue in persecuting the church. But in the ‘letters’ of Revelation, there are only vague descriptions of synagogue opposition. Thus, in my reading, synagogue opposition is not the reason for the polemic. The anti-Judaistic polemic serves rather an ‘intramural’ function to dissuade church members from affiliating with the synagogue.

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<sup>16</sup> Paul B. Duff, *Who Rides the Beast? Prophetic Rivalry and the Rhetoric of Crisis in the Churches of the Apocalypse* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

<sup>17</sup> See Rev 18 as an economic critique of Rome, Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 338-383.

<sup>18</sup> See Steven J. Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John: Reading Revelation in the Ruins* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); de Jonge, 276-90. De Jonge sets the work of Revelation in the time of Trajan; Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 37-38.

<sup>19</sup> Peder Borgen, ‘Polemic in the Book of Revelation’, in Craig A. Evans and Donald A. Hagner, *Anti-Semitism and Early Christianity: Issues in Polemic and Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 199-211.

## 2. A Historical and Co(n)textual Approach to Polemic

Sad to say, polemical sayings, with however noble a purpose, have ‘toxic possibilities that can be released over a long period’.<sup>20</sup> These could have harmful long-term consequences if understood wrongly and reapplied blindly.<sup>21</sup> This makes the right contextual understanding of a polemical situation important. Lifting a piece of polemic out of its context would naturally misrepresent the issue. On the one hand, the use of a pejorative label, ‘synagogue of Satan’ (συναγωγὴ τοῦ σατανᾶ; 2:9; 3:9) could mean picking a fight with the synagogue. On the other hand, as I suggest, bad-naming could mean an act of drawing a distinct boundary to keep out an attractive yet desirable ‘other’. Polemic in itself is a stressful thing, and polemical sayings lifted out of context bring no good, only harm.

As polemic happens in a historical situation, understanding social-historical factors contributing to it would be helpful. Moreover, polemical language often involves a creative transformation of extratextual elements<sup>22</sup> to the detriment of one’s contender.<sup>23</sup> So we need to keep an eye for such elements alluded to in a polemical depiction. The title of the thesis, ‘*Windows*’ to the polemics...: *Insights* from *Historical and Co(n)textual Analysis*’, not only reflects an emphasis on historical contexts, it also works with resonances between textual depiction and contextual elements. These elements interact with the textual depiction as co-‘texts’ in a broad sense.

### 2.1 A methodological framework: Socio-historical co(n)texts in polemic

‘Context’ is a key word in my methodology. A LISOR conference in Leiden on ‘Religious Polemics in Context’ reveals a similar emphasis.<sup>24</sup> The contextual issues covered by the papers in the conference can be summed up into three main aspects:

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<sup>20</sup> Leighton, 531.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Leighton, 529.

<sup>22</sup> Ricoeur argues the extralinguistic nature of all discourse, including metaphorical or poetic discourse. Lynn R. Huber, *Like a Bride Adorned: Reading Metaphor in John’s Apocalypse* (Emory Studies in Early Christianity; New York; London: T&T Clark International, 2007), 74; cf. Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, in Mario J. Valdés (ed.), *A Ricoeur Reader: Reflection and Imagination* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 314.

<sup>23</sup> In Bakhtin’s idea, any text is ‘the absorption and transformation of another’. Toril Moi (ed.), *The Kristeva Reader* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 37.

<sup>24</sup> Hettema and van der Kooij (eds.).

(1) the delivery of the polemic; (2) the ‘interplay’ of polemic with its ‘cultural and religious context’; and (3) the ‘identity of the polemicist and his or her group’.<sup>25</sup> These three areas receive attention, to varying degrees, in the thesis. In terms of the *first* aspect, I look at a technique of association in a subtle polemical delivery against ‘Jezebel’.<sup>26</sup> In terms of the *second* aspect, I work on the social-historical background surrounding the polemic against the so-called Jews and prophetess ‘Jezebel’.<sup>27</sup> I also highlight connections between relevant depictions and socio-historical elements.<sup>28</sup> These socio-historical elements become paint on the author’s palette to denigrate contenders. In terms of the *third* aspect, I have chosen to work on the identity of the contenders, the so-called Jews and prophetess ‘Jezebel’.<sup>29</sup>

### 2.1.1 *Co(n)texts and inter-‘textuality’*

‘Contexts’ for understanding a matter can be of socio-historical, literary or ideological kinds. I coin ‘co(n)textual’ to include both historical ‘contexts’ and co-‘texts’ of various kinds that are interacting with a text in view. Dascal describes the co-‘texts’ of a polemical delivery as works by contemporary or recent authors, which contenders use in their dispute.<sup>30</sup> But the texts used in a polemic need not necessarily be of a recent kind. I modify ‘co-texts’ here to mean the texts used in a polemic, whether contemporary, recent or ancient. Moreover, the interacting ‘texts’ need not be purely literary, but may be of a social-historical nature. As with any form of interpretation, the reading of polemic encroaches into a form of inter-‘textuality’.<sup>31</sup> With the inverted commas, ‘texts’ broadly include elements in the world outside the text. In fact, Kristeva employs Bakhtin’s concept of a ‘literary word’ being ‘a dialogue among several writings: that of the writer, the addressee (or the character) and the contemporary or earlier cultural context’.<sup>32</sup> She allows, as in the broad

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<sup>25</sup> Hettema and van der Kooij (eds.), xiv.

<sup>26</sup> Part Two, esp. ch. 9 and ch. 10, § 2.2.

<sup>27</sup> Chs. 5, 6 and 9; ch. 10, §2.

<sup>28</sup> Ch. 2, §2; ch. 3; ch. 5, §1.1; chs. 7 and 8.

<sup>29</sup> Ch. 5, §2.2; ch. 6, §6.

<sup>30</sup> Dascal, 15-33.

<sup>31</sup> For a good introduction to issues of ‘intertextually’ (here referring to the original sense limited to texts), see Steve Moyise, ‘Intertextuality and the Study of the Old Testament in the New Testament’ in Steve Moyise (ed.), *The Old Testament in the New Testament: Essays in Honour of J. L. North* (JSNTSup 189; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 14-41.

<sup>32</sup> Moi (ed.), 36; emphasis mine.

definition of inter-‘textuality’,<sup>33</sup> an interaction between the text and culture (the social world). Stefan Alkier’s insightful article that binds intertextuality to the field of semiotics also broadens the field of ‘intertextuality’ to include what I suggest here as co-‘texts’ not limited to literary kinds, but also to social-historical kinds.<sup>34</sup> Most chapters in this thesis work with the *socio-historical* world of the text. Less emphasis is given to literary co-texts, which have to be left for another project.

In the terminology within semiotics, the ‘world of the text’ is the ‘extratextual’ dimension that is involved in the interpretative process.<sup>35</sup> Such ‘extratextual’ investigation

concerns itself with the effects of *meaning of the text that emerge from the reference of the text to other extratextual signs*. Here belong precisely the classic introductory issues as well as the archaeological, social-scientific, and politico-historical questions, that is, all questions that investigate the generation of meaning *through acts of reference to text-external signs*.<sup>36</sup>

The ‘acts of reference to text-external signs’—simply put, the socio-historical connections (denotations/connotations/allusions/echoes)—form a major component in a number of studies in the thesis. Thus, besides understanding socio-historical factors contributing to the polemic under study, one observes events/personalities that are being absorbed into a depiction.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> See Christopher B. Hays, ‘Echoes of the Ancient Near East? Intertextuality and the Comparative Study of the Old Testament’, in J. Ross Wagner, C. Kavin Rowe, and A. Katherine Grieb, *The Word Leaps the Gap: Essays on Scripture and Theology in Honor of Richard B. Hays* (Grand Rapids, Mich.; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans, 2008), 20-43, see 29-30.

<sup>34</sup> See Stefan Alkier, ‘Intertextuality and the Semiotics of Biblical Texts’, in Hays, Alkier and Huizenga (eds.), 3-21. Orosz writes, linking ‘intertextual’ and ‘contextual’:

[W]ith Kristeva, the concept of text also becomes a phenomenon that encompassing all other forms of cultural (or social) praxis, a phenomenon that, by definition, is regarded as a “translinguistic” means that orders language in a new way in its own “space” so that language is set in relationship to earlier or contemporary “utterances” (énoncés)....The “other text” is broadened to the totality of literary texts (even to the entire culture), for “the word in the text is oriented toward an anterior or synchronic literary corpus...” The existence of texts in this “contextual” space in the widest sense—continuing Bakhtin’s plea for the inclusion of the context—Kristeva designates as “intertextuality”.

Magdolna Orosz, ‘Literary Reading(s) of the Bible: Aspects of a Semiotic Conception of Intertextuality and Intertextual Analysis of Texts’, in Hays, Alkier and Huizenga (eds.), 191-204, see 192.

<sup>35</sup> Alkier, 9.

<sup>36</sup> Alkier, 9; emphasis mine.

<sup>37</sup> More in §2.2 below with respect to chs. 2, 7 and 8.

### 2.1.2 Co(n)texts as key to imagery/symbolic depiction

Lynn Huber notes in the words of Ricoeur, ‘Poetic or literary texts “speak of possible worlds” and not simply ‘refer to things that are ostensive’.<sup>38</sup> This is especially so for the language of Revelation. The difficulty with Revelation is its immensely coded metaphorical (or symbolic) language. We see extensive characterization in the celestial woman (12:1-16), the bride/new Jerusalem (21:1-22:5), dragon (Rev 12), beasts (ch. 13) and a great harlot (chs. 17-18). These are tensive images in so far as they can evoke a wide variety of associations. Eugene Boring presents the extreme view of the imagery in Revelation. He writes:

A tensive symbol...sets up a tension in the mind, evokes images and overtones of meaning, and by involving the hearer-reader in the act of communication conveys a surplus of meaning that cannot be reduced to propositional language, or even to one level of meaning... A tensive symbol does not convey a clear “concept” that may be stated in objective discursive language. Tensive symbols are not informational; John’s symbolic language does not function to convey objective information about the heavenly world.<sup>39</sup>

To Boring, the author uses a kind of symbolic language that is ‘non-objectifying’ and ‘pictorial’.<sup>40</sup> The ‘ultimate realities’ that the author communicates simply ‘shatter’ the ‘laws of logical propositional language’ and the author gives seemingly irrational depictions (e.g., a sword out of Jesus’ mouth).<sup>41</sup> Boring points out rightly the difficulty in unveiling the meaning of the images. It is also due to the metaphorical nature of the images that irrational depictions occur.<sup>42</sup> But it is not totally right to say that the language in Revelation is non-objectifying. We see cues to the imagery and the identity of characters. For example, an angel explains the mystery of the Great Harlot, of the the beast and his alliances in a lengthy aside to John (17:7-18). The author meticulously provides clues, but at the same time, he does not say it all. The Harlot’s imagery is made up of many descriptive details. It is not immediately clear how they fit together. Her long name is multidirectional in evocation (17:5). Definitely, the name ‘Babylon’ used as a code, the great city ruling over the kings

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<sup>38</sup> Huber, 74-75; cf. Ricoeur, 314.

<sup>39</sup> M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation* (Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching; Louisville: John Knox Press, 1989), 57.

<sup>40</sup> Boring, 53-54.

<sup>41</sup> Boring, 57.

<sup>42</sup> See Huber, 75.

(17:18), the seven hills<sup>43</sup> (17:9), and the many peoples she sits upon (17:15) confirm her Roman/imperial identity. But there are other elements in her name and description that move further from this identification as a city and an empire. She is the mother of prostitutes and abominations (17:5). She also calls herself a ‘queen’ (18:7). One is made to think how these elements fit into the Roman imperial context. New contexts may also be evoked. There is some degree of tentativeness to her interpretation.

Only a few studies focus on metaphorical/symbolic depictions in Revelation. I will highlight where their discussions come into the picture with reference to contextual interpretation, which I see as a key to the metaphorical/symbolic depiction in Revelation. Metaphorical/symbolic language poses the difficulty for the interpretation of Revelation, while I suggest that contextual interpretation, such as that involving attention to socio-historical co(n)texts, provides a key for its clarification. Ian Paul performs the exegesis of metaphor<sup>44</sup> in Revelation in both the ‘diachronic and synchronic aspects’, namely the ‘historical and literary contexts of the images themselves’.<sup>45</sup> These two aspects boil down to the ‘interpretative context of the first-century Christian community’ and co-texts in the OT.<sup>46</sup> But he does elaboration further on what I see as a ‘co(n)textual’ interpretative method that he suggests within his article.

Gregory Beale reserves a section in his commentary on interpreting symbols in Revelation. He denotes ‘symbols’ broadly as ‘figurative comparisons’, such as ‘metaphor, simile, and other comparative forms of speech’.<sup>47</sup> It is this broader definition of symbolic language that I also adopt. He gives attention to Jewish numerical symbols<sup>48</sup> and propositional metaphors, such as ‘A is B’. Beale discusses how one can find the points of comparison between seemingly incongruous A and B,

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<sup>43</sup> See Verg. *Aen.* 6.783.

<sup>44</sup> Paul defines metaphor as ‘depiction of one aspect of reality in terms of another’. Ian Paul, ‘The Book of Revelation: Image, Symbol and Metaphor’, in Steve Moyise (ed.), *Studies in the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: New York: T&T Clark, 2001), 131-47, see 135-44, see 135.

<sup>45</sup> Paul, 145.

<sup>46</sup> Paul, 145.

<sup>47</sup> G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1999), 55.

<sup>48</sup> Beale, 58-64.

given both A and B.<sup>49</sup> Numerical symbols occur in Revelation, but it is a complex kind of open-ended imagery that poses the greatest difficulty. Furthermore, in most of the metaphorical depictions in Revelation, only the ‘tenor’ (subject as depicted by the metaphor) and *not* the ‘referent’ (subject of the metaphor) is given. The reader is invited to seek out the ‘referent’ (e.g. 7:13; 13:18; 17:9) based on the clues provided for identification (e.g. 7:13-14; 14:4; 17:7-12). So in the terms of propositional metaphor that Beale discusses, there is an A and a ‘copular’, as well as an invited referent, B, which is often left ambiguous. Moreover, due to the largely polyvalent nature of Revelation’s imagery, the referent may consist of a set of entities (e.g., B-C-D), rather than a single identification. So the propositional metaphor that Beale discusses may not be entirely applicable to Revelation’s images.

Richard Bauckham gives us a way forward to interpreting the images in Revelation. He writes:

[I]t would be a serious mistake to understand the images of Revelation as timeless symbols. Their character conforms to the contextuality of Revelation as a letter to the seven churches of Asia. Their resonances in the specific social, political, cultural and religious world of their first readers need to be understood if their meaning is to be appropriated today.<sup>50</sup>

The socio-historical world, OT texts, pagan mythology and religion, and contemporary social expectations (such as the Nero-*redivivus* myth) resonate in the images of Revelation.<sup>51</sup> These resonating elements are the surfacing points of contact between the text and its outside world. For instance, I highlight the textual elements that evoke extratextual connections with a Jerusalem-conqueror, Titus, in the figure of the ‘angel-king over the army from the abyss’ (Rev 9:1-11).<sup>52</sup> This character is veiled in a mysterious image. But his identity surfaces when clues to social-historical elements are considered.

A particular image with all its descriptive details could evoke different interacting contexts. As one tries to make sense of the varied contexts elicited, one arrives at an overlapping sphere between the various contexts, and provides a focus

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<sup>49</sup> Beale, 55-58.

<sup>50</sup> Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 19-20.

<sup>51</sup> Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 18-19.

<sup>52</sup> See ch. 2, §2.

for the interpretation. We take the Great Harlot as an example. Besides the Roman/imperial image in her, an explicit declaration of her queenly status and her lavish attire in the colour of royalty bring in the context of imperial queens. At the same time, her gaudy and bejewelled attire and her epithet, the ‘great prostitute’, call for another seemingly incongruous context: that of a whore/whoredom. Her Roman imperial quality interacts with her queenly context and her relation to whoredom to elicit the context of an imperial harlot-queen. I show that in part Empress Valeria Messalina comes to mind within these interacting contexts.<sup>53</sup> I further show a related context of Graeco-Roman goddesses is elicited in relation to that of imperial queens and the details in the Great Harlot’s depiction. This is, no doubt, a simplified version of very complicated mental process of evocation. But one sees how the role of ‘resonances’ within an interacting context can be helpful in reading metaphorical images.

A conventional literary framework, topos, can also be evoked in images. This constitutes another kind of context. The question of whether an image alludes to a stereotypical topos *or* to real historical events/characters enters the discussion here. My answer is: it can be ‘both...and’ depending on the shape of an image. Barbara Rossing<sup>54</sup> situates the interpretation of the Bride *vis-à-vis* the Great Harlot, within the ancient two-women topos of the good and evil women in biblical wisdom literature and Graeco-Roman writings. She further engages these topoi with a topos of ‘two-choice’, to be made ethically between the harlot- and bride-city.<sup>55</sup> This interpretation using topoi is helpful. While Rossing engages literary topoi, my reading engages social-historical resonances. Resonances of vilified queens and goddesses (of ‘idolatrous’<sup>56</sup> and ‘adulterous’<sup>57</sup> kinds) are evoked in the face of the Great Harlot.<sup>58</sup> Social-historical context of the workings of a prophetess named Jezebel is also explored.<sup>59</sup> The incorporation of a literary reading of a good-evil woman topos as

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<sup>53</sup> See ch. 7, §1.4.

<sup>54</sup> Barbara Rossing, *The Choice between Two Cities: Whore, Bride, and Empire in the Apocalypse* (HTS 48; Harrisburg, Pa: Trinity Press International, 1999).

<sup>55</sup> An extended summary of her work can be found in Huber, 38-42.

<sup>56</sup> Pagan deities are the source and reason for idolatry.

<sup>57</sup> E.g., Aphrodite, the patron goddess of prostitutes.

<sup>58</sup> Ch. 7.

<sup>59</sup> One could also read the name of the wayward prophetess ‘Jezebel’ as a ‘*topos*’. While this would take a different method of looking at the ‘Jezebel’ figures in Jewish literature beyond the focus of this



another set of interacting context would add flavour to the reading, but within the never-ending evocation of contexts, I have chosen to focus on social-historical ones.

In deciphering the image of the Great Harlot, I have not so much tapped upon the OT topoi of the Wisdom and Folly in the form of a prudent and adulterous woman respectively (Prov 8:12-9:6 and 9:13-17; cf. 7:10-21), nor the topos of the apostate people of God engaged in 'fornication' (e.g. Hos 2, Ezek 23). While one can explore such lines of inquiry, the rich descriptive details of the Great Harlot highlight her regal nature, an imperial queen, subversively and accursedly depicted as a prostitute. Her epiphanic moment which brings about much amazement (17:3-6), and her death, which is mourned and lamented (18:9-19), connote her, not just in terms of her ability as an economic beneficiary of sea-traders (as the interpretative angle the imperial Rome would provide), but as a female personification of a more exalted character who is the object of worship: a goddess/deity. Though I focus on the woman image of the Great Harlot's depiction and not on her city aspect, I can see deities very much part of the economic system and the social structures of the Graeco-Roman world. (Deities were present in all sorts of social occasions, including trade guilds/voluntary associations, communal meals, festivities, and imperial cults, in which social advancement and networking happens). I show that the details of the Great Harlot's depictions bring to the forefront the context of queens and deities (both vilified). Her prominent imperial character of her depiction, including her city-aspect as Rome or the Roman empire, presents her in closer relation to these other contexts that I suggest than to the OT topoi mentioned above. The criterion for deciding which contexts to engage with a symbolic/metaphorical depiction, would then be what sort of resonances are called up in a primary way by the descriptive details in the depiction. For example, I see the sum total of her descriptive details resonating more with the Graeco-Roman elements, than with an OT depiction, concept or topos. Nevertheless, the various interpretative contexts are not mutually exclusive. Rather, they jostle for prominence as the reader gives attention to different aspects of her polyvalent depiction.

Lynn Huber's survey on ancient, medieval and modern theories of metaphor is valuable.<sup>60</sup> She also surveys nuptial traditions within the Roman social discourse.<sup>61</sup>

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predominantly socio-historical study. My study of her is in terms of a social-historical construct (ch. 8).

<sup>60</sup> Huber, 1-75.

Her main contribution lies in the application of conceptual metaphor, particularly on the mappings of source and target domains in the imagery of the bride/new Jerusalem. But the resulting propositional statements appear too piecemeal and simplified for the rich and extended imagery in Revelation. Examples of such statements are: a ‘city is a woman’ (21:2)<sup>62</sup> and ‘God is a king’/‘is an emperor’ (in 19:6-8).<sup>63</sup> Some are more contrived, for example, ‘a woman is a container’<sup>64</sup> and ‘an event is an object; time is a path’.<sup>65</sup> More helpful is her account of a method to identifying the places where a metaphorical ‘idea’ (or referent) can be located in the text. In Revelation, the ‘referent’ could be made explicit within the metaphor itself, though this is seldom. Otherwise it could be implied therein. Huber calls this first category, ‘explicit referents’. If the referent lies in another part of the text, it belongs to another category, ‘co-textual implicit referents’. In the third category, ‘contextual implicit referents’ are identified

only through inferences made by virtue of some knowledge apart from the text itself. Contextual metaphors require an interpreter to infer the referent by employing “one’s knowledge of conventional language use and the world”.<sup>66</sup>

The second and third kinds of referents are most ambiguous. For these categories the role of a context, whether intratextual or extratextual, becomes especially important.

I see both intratextual and extratextual evocations leading to the identification of Titus as the ‘beast from the sea-abyss’. *Intratextual* cues (or Huber’s ‘co-textual’) aid the connection between the dragon and a fallen star (Rev 12:3-4, 7-12, and 9:1, 11). This leads to the identification of the ‘beast from the sea-abyss’ (13:1) and the ‘angel-king with his army from the abyss’ (9:2-3, 11), as the dragon initiates the former from the sea (13:1) and the fallen star initiates the latter from the abyss (9:1-3, 11). The sea and abyss are found to be analogous.<sup>67</sup> In this reading, the interacting

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<sup>61</sup> Huber, 113-33.

<sup>62</sup> Huber, 164.

<sup>63</sup> Huber, 138.

<sup>64</sup> Huber, 172.

<sup>65</sup> Huber, 143.

<sup>66</sup> Huber, 83, citing Gerard Steen, ‘Metaphor and Discourse: Towards a Linguistic Checklist for Metaphor Analysis’, in Lynne Cameron and Graham Low (eds.), *Researching and Applying Metaphor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 91.

<sup>67</sup> Ch. 2, §1.4, para 2.

‘co-texts’ (chs. 12-12 and 9: 1-11) act as keys to unlock each other. Furthermore, socio-historical context is another key to the alluded identity of the ‘beast from the sea-abyss’. Within the first two woes (5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> trumpets; 9:1 ff.), the siege-cum-battle scenario, allusive temporal and military details evoke the context of the Jewish War of 66-70 C.E. (ch. 2, §§2-3).

Eva Räßple connects modern/post-modern philosophical and artistic spheres with the image of the city in Revelation.<sup>68</sup> Her readings (or rather impressions) engages a multitude of different contexts, hanging loosely on the theme of the metaphor and city. Nonetheless, she has a section on ‘historical’ rootedness for interpretation in metaphorical depiction. She writes:

[A]n artist can never completely change traditional patterns, because she/he risks the possibility that nobody will understand the work. Yet the artist might venture out in the limited tension between tradition and novelty to give her/his work a lively character. Analogously, for any metaphor there must always be a historically shaped referential field, which human beings seek to understand in an act of imaginative sympathy.<sup>69</sup>

Her comment is helpful in two ways. Firstly, a metaphorical expression is rooted in a shared ‘historical referential field’. The role of socio-historical context becomes evident. Secondly, there is a creative element in metaphorical depiction. Extratextual elements are transformed into something else—both evoking yet distancing the adopted elements. For example, in my interpretation of the mark of the beast as an allusion to the tefillin worn in the way by ‘outsiders’ to Judaism, one sees correspondences to the placement of the tefillin to the mark of the beast. Yet, one finds it puzzling in this interpretation that the beast, which is elsewhere presented as an imperial authority (an emperor), is now a Judaistic authority as well. This is the creative (distancing part) of the metaphorical depiction. But his second title of a ‘false prophet’ (16:13; 19:20; 20:10)—a religious figure known in the Jewish-Christian tradition—could perhaps help to accommodate this idea. One sees that if the metaphorical imagery in Revelation is the problem, co(n)textual interpretation, especially a social-historical kind, is a key to understanding it.

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<sup>68</sup> Eva Maria Räßple, *The Metaphor of the City in the Apocalypse of John* (Studies in Biblical Literature 67; New York: Peter Lang, 2004).

<sup>69</sup> Räßple, 53.

### 2.1.3 Conclusion on method

Readings of Revelation have been posited with various levels of detachment from specific historical events, but I show that the socio-historical context in which the work was composed informs our understanding of it. Yarbrow Collins notes,

Perhaps the hardest won and most dearly held result of historical-critical scholarship on the Revelation to John is the theory that the work must be interpreted in terms of historical context in which it was composed. Such an approach refers the images of Revelation to contemporary historical events and to eschatological images current at the time.<sup>70</sup>

In sum, the thesis gives attention to the social-historical world of the text. In concise terms, one can understand the method I use as follows: a co(n)textual interpretation with a focus on social-historical elements. It involves:

- (1) *reconstruction of socio-historical circumstances* that helps one understand the polemic in Revelation. This includes some preliminary studies to give ‘historical moorings’ for the depictions in Revelation. These studies lead into a social-historical reconstruction of the issues involved in the polemic against the so-called ‘Jews’ and prophetess ‘Jezebel’.
- (2) *highlighting of social-historical echoes/allusions/denotations/connotations* in selected imagery which contribute to an understanding and/or reading of the polemics under study. Echoes/allusions resonate with elements in the ‘socio-historical world’ of the text.

One sees the text of Revelation tightly woven with the world outside the text. A contextual approach is the way the polemical evocations are heard, imagery deciphered, ancient circumstances relived, and underlying issues postulated. Though literary co-texts are equally important for the process of understanding, my focus will be mainly on social-historical co(n)texts, although it is difficult to separate the two strictly.

Where would this method compare with that in other studies giving much attention to social-historical circumstances in Revelation? Steven Friesen’s *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John*, for example, gives a full archaeological study of the imperial cult. The contributions of his work do not lie in this alone but in the

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<sup>70</sup> Adela Yarbrow Collins, ‘The Political Perspective of the Revelation to John’, *JBL* 96 (1977): 241-56, see 241.

erudite explication of a ‘modified phenomenological approach’.<sup>71</sup> The method is driven by the questions, ‘How shall we relate literature to material culture? What social theory will enable us to draw connections?’<sup>72</sup> This seems to be asking the question I ask about the how one finds the intersection between textual depiction and the world outside. He applies a ‘postcolonial strategy, more specifically a contrapuntal interpretation of dominant and resistant histories’<sup>73</sup> after Edward Said’s method.<sup>74</sup> This method acts as a bridge between the material culture and the world of Revelation. Through sociological categories, such as ‘cosmogony’, ‘human maturation’ and ‘cosmology’, the material culture of the imperial world and the textual world are read contrapuntally.<sup>75</sup> On account of his postcolonial strategy, an anti-imperial motif becomes dominant in his interpretation.

Though we both work on socio-historical contexts, his method and reading differ from mine. Firstly, in my method of resonance, there is no particularly mediating ideology between the textual elements and socio-historical elements. This is because the imagery employs elements in the world out there as paint on the palette. But I shall say, if there is a mediating plane, it is a reasonable leap of imagination which makes sense of certain associations. Secondly, my reading of the polemic in Revelation delineates more than one category of contenders: the imperial, the Judaistic and the pagan.

Among various reconstructions, Leonard L. Thompson examines the ‘historiography’ of Domitian’s portrayal. He takes into account the rhetoric of smearing Domitian in favour of Trajan.<sup>76</sup> While his attention to the rhetorical bias is noteworthy and even necessary if one is to understand the true state of things, no depiction, whether of a material or literary kind, is without ideological/rhetorical clothing.<sup>77</sup> The metaphorical depictions in Revelation draw from a myriad of social-historical ‘impressions’ or settled ideas that are not necessarily facts. The ‘colours’

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<sup>71</sup> Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 214.

<sup>72</sup> Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 3.

<sup>73</sup> Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 4.

<sup>74</sup> Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 19-21.

<sup>75</sup> Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 4.

<sup>76</sup> Leonard L. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 111-15.

<sup>77</sup> Statues, for example, can serve a propaganda agenda.

employed in these depictions are likely popular ones which have been etched into the consciousness of the populace. Using stereotyped ideas would allow readers to grasp the point easily. Thus, for the purpose of spotting social evocations in imagery, it may not help to ‘peel off layers’ of the onion (or to ‘demythologise’). Besides, a totally unbiased reconstruction of reality, if this is possibly attained, may not be ‘the reality’ that an ancient reader influenced by propaganda and smears would have experienced.

J. Nelson Royalty<sup>78</sup> presents, as does Friesen and Thompson, valuable research for understanding the ancient imperial world. He studies the socio-economic character of the imperial world, particularly the imperial patronage system and commercial realities, which he sees as overarching themes in Revelation. In short, the message of Revelation reacts against the ‘worship’ of imperial power and wealth. Also helpful is Bauckham’s reading of elements in the imperial economy and their depictions in Rev 18.<sup>79</sup> The method I employ of finding direct points of relation to the outside world of the text is similar to that of Royalty and Bauckham.

## 2.2 Chapter outline and accompanying issues

I now outline the chapters and elaborate on issues along the way. The detailed outline with accompanying issues discussed is intended as a guide as the reader progresses through the individual studies.

**Part One** consists of matters of introduction and establishing a historical ‘handhold’ on the slippery text of Revelation. The ‘handhold/anchor’ attained in Chapter Two is further developed in chapters three and four of part two. Besides this, **Part Two** engages circumstances to understand the *polemic against the so-called Jews*. In the final chapter of this part, I propose the issue driving the author to use harsh language on the so-called ‘Jews’ and synagogue. Chapters within this part provide the building blocks that allow the reader to be able to engage with the text, and later with issue of the polemic under study. **Part Three** demonstrates a very specific web of derogatory associations inherent at the sub-text level between the prophetess ‘Jezebel’, an OT queen (similarly named) and the Great Harlot of

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<sup>78</sup> J. Nelson Kraybill, *Imperial Cult and Commerce in John’s Apocalypse* (JSNTSup 132; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996).

<sup>79</sup> Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 338-383

Revelation. I engage with *socio-historical contexts* to study aspects of the characters and arrive at constructs of each of their portrayal. I next relate the three character-constructs to demonstrate a very specific technique of polemic that I see in the text against the prophetess ‘Jezebel’. **Part Four** reviews the work done and highlights the side and main contributions of the thesis, some of which, if granted, would redirect the present trend of interpretation. I further highlight how the polemic against the ‘Jews’ and ‘Jezebel’ fit into a larger picture of an ‘anti-syncretistic’ stance over against the synagogue, pagan culture and the imperial cult.

#### 2.2.1 Part One: On the preliminaries

**Chapter One** stipulates the area of study and presents a methodological framework to explicate the method used in this thesis. It also situates the method chosen among related studies performed in Revelation. Social-historical context is a key used to unlock the slippery images (or the symbolic language) of Revelation. An outline to the thesis is provided with attention to some underlying issues. A section on the issue of dating (§3 below) may be of interest.

In **Chapter Two**, I try to make a connection between textual elements and the socio-historical world of the first readers. This is performed together with an intratextual examination of the structure/plot of Rev 4-22. One gets to see points of correspondences between textual elements and historical events/persons. The findings are as follows: It is observed that the first Roman-Jewish war (66-70 C.E.) and the general Titus are both prominently featured in the first and second woes (Rev 9 and parts of 11:1-14). Titus is alluded to in the figure of the ‘angel-king with an army from the abyss’ (9:3, 11), which is also found to be equivalent to the ‘beast from the sea-abyss’ (13:1-10; 17:8, 11). These findings are developed in the next chapter.

#### 2.2.2 Part Two: On the polemic against the so-called ‘Jews’

Following the findings in Chapter One, in which we see Titus rising to prominence, **Chapter Three** sees the appearance of Domitian, his successor, the other Flavian emperor in the textual depiction. This is suggested in relation to Domitian’s promotion of the Flavian cult that included the worship of Titus. The ‘beast from the land’ is given all the authority of the first beast and promotes its worship (Rev 13:11-14). In addition, a suggestion is made between the dragon and the two beasts (that I

call the ‘Satanic trio’) and the three Flavian emperors. The Flavian provincial cult in Ephesus operating from 90 C.E. is posited as a helpful background to understanding Rev 13:11-18. It has to be noted that the depictions in the images do not match at all points the events or persons echoed. But general resemblances can be detected and the connections evoked.

Now, with the Flavian period depicted prominently in Revelation (ch. 9, parts of ch. 11 and ch.13), **Chapter Four** identifies a historical situation late in Domitian’s time that could have amounted to a situation of crisis for Christians. Previously, scholars could have overlooked or underestimated the stress during the end of Domitian’s time. I suggest that the severe and rampant accusations late in Domitian’s rule had implicated Christians quite closely. I will illustrate this in more detail in §3.1.5 and in Chapter Four. The rampant charges of ἀθεότης, ἀσεβεία and *maiestas* could have easily been applied to Christians reluctant to worship pagan or imperial deities. Out of the various social groups, the Judaistic community, the pagans and Christians, Christians is most vulnerable to false accusations. Though the Judaistic community was also basically monotheistic, it was recognised as upholding an ancestral custom recognised by Rome. Besides, the synagogues had developed ways to honour the emperor apart from emperor-worship. The Christian community did not have these advantages. Christian refusal to honour the emperor by participating in the imperial cult could be taken as a subversive behaviour. Conversely, monotheism was not an issue to pagans, and so participation in pagan and imperial cults was not an abhorrence to pagans. Thus, Christians were the most vulnerable and likely formed a significant part of those accused. In addition to these stresses, Domitian’s brief hunt for Davidic descendants in his last year also affected Christian Jews and disturbed the peace of the Christian community. These stresses were on top of the social pressure in relation to the Flavian cult in Asia Minor that began operation the last half decade of Domitian’s rule.

Up to this point in the thesis, the Flavian period becomes firmly established within Revelation’s depiction. Both the provincial Flavian cult in Asia Minor and the crisis during Domitian’s last years can explain the depictions of beast-worship and the tone of suffering and vengeance.<sup>80</sup> Having set images in the text in its socio-

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<sup>80</sup> Scholars have given up looking for a critical period during Domitian’s time. Here the cold ashes are reignited.



historical context, I then move on to examine the polemic against the so-called Jews with its broader social-historical milieu.

In *Chapter Five*, I propose the underlying issue of the polemic we see against the so-called 'Jews'. Certain socio-historical circumstances were engaged for the reconstruction: (1) the tendency for some in Christian communities of Asia Minor and in the empire at large to judaize (drawing on ch. 4 §1.2.1, para. 2; ch. 5, §1.2); (2) the depiction of the tefillin worn by outsiders to Judaism as the mark of the beast on the forehead and hand (ch. 5, §1.1); (3) the social pressure from the imperial cult permeating guilds/voluntary associations (drawing on ch. 6, §4); and (4) the better established position of synagogues than churches in the Roman imperial world (§2.3). These factors lead to a hypothesis that some Christians were seeking/feigning affiliation with the synagogue to escape the social pressure from the imperial cult (§1.3).<sup>81</sup> I suggest the polemic presented against the so-called Jews was to draw a sharp boundary between the church and the Judaistic community to dissuade Christians from such an affiliation.

I present main details of the argument here. I interpret the serious prohibition against worshipping the beast's image and bearing its mark (14:9-11; cf. 13:11-18) as a prohibition against participation in the imperial cult and 'judaizing behaviour' (the tefillin evoked by the mark as the connection). Without any protection from the socially established synagogues, obedient Christians find themselves vulnerable to threats from the public in relation to non-participation in the imperial cult. These vulnerable ones are called to remain faithful even to death. Moreover, Christian judaizing behaviour is reflected in the writings of Ignatius. Non-Christian sources also comment on a judaizing trend observed in the imperial world. Even in the days of Paul, there was a pressure/tendency to judaize among churches.<sup>82</sup> Drawing also from Chapter Four, there may be an indication that Christians were part of the 'many' (πολλοὶ) adopting Jewish customs/lifestyle accused in Domitian's time.

I deduce that the ones claiming to be Jews (Rev 2:9 and 3:9) to be mainly ethnic Jews belonging to a local synagogue (§2.2). I surmise that the polemic of naming the synagogue after 'Satan' and robbing its members of true Jewish identity

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<sup>81</sup> Beale (p. 13) makes a similar suggestion.

<sup>82</sup> E.g., Gal 2:14. Apostle Paul plays down the significance of the Jewish observances, such as circumcision, for the Christian faith (e.g., Gal 5:6; 6:15), which could be a reaction to judaizing tendency in some churches.

is, in essence, an act of drawing a distinct boundary between the church and the synagogue. It is a bid to dissuade Christians from affiliating or feigning affiliation with it through an act of name-calling. The polemic expressed against ‘Jews’ and the synagogue was not so much a reaction to their βλασφημία (2:9), though that provides a reason to polemicise. Rather, the main concern is with church members who join the ranks of the ‘other’ (§§2.3-4).

### 2.2.3 Part Three: On the polemic against prophetess ‘Jezebel’

In this part, I aim to demonstrate a very specific reading of a polemical technique against a wayward prophetess, ‘Jezebel’. ‘Jezebel’ and her followers and other like company were heavily criticized for fornication and adultery (sexual immorality), and eating idol-food. This technique is demonstrated based on three characters studied in their social-historical contexts. In Chapter Six, I explore the context of the paired offences within the prevalent culture of social meals, voluntary associations and the imperial cult of the Graeco-Roman world. These were contexts where pagan and imperial worship were common, thus the presence of food offered to idols. Furthermore, the meals with the usual drinking party offer temptations to moral looseness. Importantly in section 6.1, I postulate a socio-historical picture of who ‘Jezebel’ might have been and what her circumstances could be like. (I call this ‘character-construct 1’.) ‘Jezebel’ is seen to be a leader of a voluntary association, which draws some members from the church in Thyatira. It may be that mysteries were a part of her cult, given her esoteric teaching restricted for an inner group.

Let me do a slight detour here. Scholars general interpret her ‘fornicating’ (πορνεύω, 2:20) as a metaphorical expression for idolatry. Besides the common use of πορνεία or פְּנִיָּה (fornication/prostituting) in the OT tradition as a metaphor for idolatry,<sup>83</sup> scholars’ reluctance of accepting a literal reading could be due also to a disbelief that such offensive acts could have occurred in the church context.

Although I do not exclude a possibility that there is a layer of metaphorical meaning referring to idolatry (Jezebel is also engaged in idolatrous behaviour), I tend towards a literal interpretation of her fornication and adultery mainly because in the pagan

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<sup>83</sup> E.g., Hos 4:13-14; Deut 31:16; Judg 8:33, in terms of ‘whoring after other gods’; Ezek 16, 23. See Phyllis A. Bird, ‘Prostitution in the Social World and Religious Rhetoric of Ancient Israel’, in Christopher A. Faraone and Laura K. McClure (eds.), *Prostitutes and Courtesans in the Ancient World* (Wisconsin: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 40-58, see 49-50, 53-55.

context, in which Jezebel and her followers were involved (in my postulation) could have easily contributed to the pair of deviant behaviours (2: 20, 22). I illustrate in the chapter that idolatry and sexual license were common in the Graeco-Roman society (ch. 6, §§1 and 2) and were possible even among members of the Christian circles (ch. 6, §5). For example, we find πορνεία in the literal sense of the word being denounced in the letters to the Corinthians (1 Cor 5:1; 6:9, 13, 15-18; 10:8; 2 Cor 12:21). It appears that certain members of the Corinthian church were led into sin (5:1; 7:2). So it is not impossible that πορνεία and μοικεία could have been meant literally also in Revelation. The terms with the same root for fornication (‘πόρν-’) and adultery (‘μοιχ-’) are used both in 1 Cor 6:9 and Rev 2:20, 22. The two verbs are referred to in the literal sense in 1 Cor 6:9 in a warning to Christians not to commit such offences. It could be that certain members of the churches in Revelation (2:14, 20, 22) could have been led into sexual sin/temptation by the teaching of ‘Jezebel’, which accommodated the culture of the times (see also ch. 6, §2.1).

Following this, **Chapter Seven** examines the second character that will be involved in a web of association: the Great Harlot of Rev 17-18. As I have done and will do for Queen Jezebel, I draw upon *social-historical* context of the Graeco-Roman world for her interpretation. (I call the reading character-construct 2). I examine her *woman-aspect* within the Graeco-Roman background, particularly illustrating the queen and goddess images that I see in her depiction. I *note specifically* here that this choice to give attention to her woman-aspect and her social-historical resonances fills two gaps in scholarship. Firstly, the ‘city-aspect’ of the Great Harlot (or Babylon) has received more attention than her ‘woman-aspect’.<sup>84</sup> Secondly, while not a few have discussed the Jewish literary allusions in the Great Harlot/Babylon,<sup>85</sup> socio-historical echoes in her woman-aspect have thus

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<sup>84</sup> City-aspect: Räpple, 140-78; Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 338-83; G. Biguzzi, ‘Is the Babylon of Revelation Rome or Jerusalem?’ *Biblica* 87 (2006): 371-86; C. H. Dyer, ‘The Identity of Babylon in Revelation 17-18’ (Parts One and Two), *BibSac* 144 (1987): 305-16 and 433-449. Woman-aspect: Duff, 83-92, 97-112. Rossing, *The Choice between Two Cities*, bridges the woman and city aspects through a study of *topoi*.

<sup>85</sup> Beale, 854-63, 889-925; Steve Moyise, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation* (JSNTSup 115; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 22, 72-78, 123-23, such as extensive allusions to Ezek 16, 23, 26-28 in Rev 17-18. David E. Aune, ‘Apocalypse Renewed: An Intertextual Reading of the Apocalypse of John’, in David Barr (ed.), *Reading the Book of Revelation: A Resource for Students* (SBLRBS; Atlanta: SBL, 2003), 44-70, see 60-62. Here, Aune also includes some extratextual materials, such as art work, as intertexts (see his reference to *ekphrasis*). For how OT passages Nahum 3:4 (oracle against Nineveh) Isa 23 and Ezek 26-27 (oracles against Tyre) and Jer 50-51 (oracle against Babylon) alluded to in Rev 17-18 contribute to an anti-imperial rhetoric in

far received very little attention. I contribute in terms of her portrayal as a conflation of Graeco-Roman queens and popular goddesses—an area which has received little attention. The study of her woman-aspect in light of *socio-historical echoes* has proved fruitful. Fascinating allusions or echoes to tyrannical queens and popular goddesses in the depiction are seen in her depiction.

The Great Harlot sitting on a beast is seen to connote, in one respect, Agrippina the Younger, who was murdered by Nero in a notorious act of matricide. This echoes the beast and his accomplices murdering the Great Harlot (17:16). Messalina, the ‘harlot-queen’, fits the bill of the Great Harlot in terms of her notorious sexual exploits. Since imperial women were often assimilated to goddesses, correspondences in characteristics with popular/important goddesses (such as Cybele, Aphrodite, Isis and Roma) allow the Great Harlot to take on other faces.

**Chapter Eight** studies the third character, Queen Jezebel (‘character-construct 3’). I study her likewise in relation to the *social-historical* context, as I do for the prophetess ‘Jezebel’ and the Great Harlot. But this time, she is read within the ANE world. Interestingly, I find aspects of queens and goddesses reflected in her OT depiction. Jezebel’s intriguing death scene (2 Kgs 9:30-37) represents the climax of an anti-Jezebelian polemic in the Kings narrative (cf. 2 Kgs 9:7, 23). Overtones in the narrative depict Jezebel as the ‘woman at the window’ (2 Kgs 9:30), which alludes to her role as goddess Astarte (or as the goddess’ representative). In addition, I show that Jezebel’s role as the גְּבִירָה (great lady) and as queen mother also corresponds to the role of goddess Asherah, to whom she leads the nation in worship. The gruesome depiction of Jezebel’s death—an account full of ironical overtones—is seen to carry an invective not just towards the queen, but even towards the goddesses she is associated with. This fits the anti-idolatry framework of the Kings narrative.

Using ancient contexts for the interpretation of an OT text is an underexplored area. Though OT texts were themselves part of the ANE cultural milieu, research in comparative studies still lacks the sophistication of intertextual

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Revelation, see Friesen, *Imperial cults*, 205-207. For another discussion on the various OT verses alluded to in Rev 17-18, see Robert M. Royalty, *The Streets of Heaven: The Ideology of Wealth in the Apocalypse of John* (Macon, Ga: Mercer University Press, 1998), 191-92, 94-97; Adela Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1984), 121-22. Great Harlot as Jerusalem intertextual connections: Margaret Barker, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (London: T&T Clark, 2000), 279-301.

studies between the OT and the New.<sup>86</sup> One can assume a New Testament's author's knowledge of Old, but one is less sure of what kind of comparative materials had gone into the production of the OT texts.<sup>87</sup> As the attempt must be to some degree speculative, one needs to be aware of one's assumptions. As in NT studies, I observe that socio-historical contexts are helpful for OT interpretation. For example, one finds the death scene of Queen Jezebel illuminated by attention to its ANE context.

*Chapter Nine* employs the three character-constructs, each *socio-historically constructed* in the preceding chapters, and interacts them together. This is to demonstrate a polemical technique that lies inherent in the text of Revelation. The author is seen to draw a purposeful connection between the false prophetess 'Jezebel', the OT Queen Jezebel and the Great Harlot.

This web of association kicks off with a resonance in a name. Now, whether 'Jezebel' is a nick-name or a real name does not change the task at hand, though a nick-name would indicate more intentionality on the part of the author. Although 'Jezebel' appears to be a real person operating in the church of Thyatira,<sup>88</sup> her name is likely metaphorical. It is less likely that she was born with the name (without it sounding like a curse). Either way, the name 'Jezebel' *evokes an association* within the text with a notorious queen.<sup>89</sup> Though one may not see at first how the Great Harlot is involved, further commonalities between the two 'Jezebels' and the Great Harlot which I highlight strengthen the web of connections. A subtle polemic is seen to lie in such a web of derogatory association.

Let me do some clarification. One can call this interaction of character-constructs across different texts 'intertextual' reading. But it is intertextual of a

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<sup>86</sup> Exploring new grounds, Christopher Hays has attempted to apply Richard Hays' seven principles of echoes for comparative studies with texts in ANE, but it brings along more questions than can be answered due to the little we know about the surrounding circumstances. Richard Hays' list of echoes applies more to texts than to socio-historical elements; see C. Hays, 20-43.

<sup>87</sup> C. Hays, 40-41.

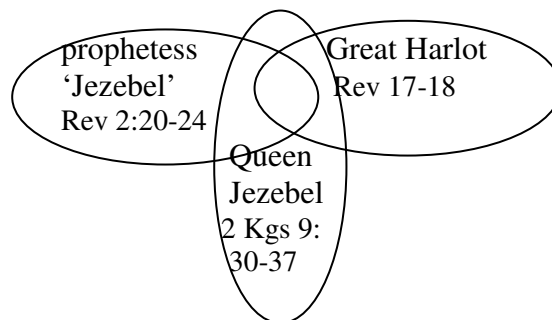
<sup>88</sup> 'Jezebel' is likely a person operating within the church of Thyatira because the other opponents with the same paired offences, the Nicolaitans and the followers of Balaam's teaching, are depicted equally as real groups in the church. She is further given time to repent. She seems to be in a prior showdown (inter-personal clash) with the author (2:21). But the names 'Jezebel' or 'Balaam' are likely metaphorical. Boxall employs the character 'Jezebel' as a person (not a ephemeral entity) in his hypothetical letter written by 'Jezebel' to John. Ian Boxall, 'Jezebel' of Thyatira to John of Patmos', in Philip R. Davies (ed.), *Yours Faithfully: Virtual Letters from the Bible* (Bible World; London; Oakville: Equinox, 2004), 147-151, see 147.

<sup>89</sup> Beale notes the allusion in the name 'Jezebel' to the OT queen. See Beale, 261.

limited form, and in so far as it involves characters from two texts. I note that attention has been given to intertextual use of the OT in Revelation, particularly by Gregory Beale and Steve Moyise.<sup>90</sup> There is of course room for such method of exploration, but I have explained my focus in this thesis is socio-historical. The Great Harlot and the two other women are all studied *socio-historically* in three separate chapters (ch. 6, §6.1; chs. 7 and 8). *On equal basis*, methodologically-speaking, the three character constructs are put into an interaction in the final chapter of Part Three. Only at this point, their respective texts are brought into an interaction:

- (1) 2 Kgs 9:30-37, which presents the climax of an anti-Jezebelian polemic in the Kings narrative and depicts a gruesome (literal) downfall of the queen;
- (2) Rev 17-18, which lies equally at the climax of the polemic in Revelation in which the downfall of a Great Harlot is depicted; and
- (3) Rev 2:20-24, which presents the prophetess ‘Jezebel’ at the centre of a polemical delivery against her.

A diagram illustrates this interaction of the three separate character-constructs on equal footings:



**Figure 1 Interaction between three separate socio-historical constructs.**

As this chapter enters somewhat into the arena of inter-‘textuality’ that includes separate texts, how does the reading of correlations measure in terms of Richard Hays’ (literary) intertextual criteria? He notes seven tests for ‘echoes’: ‘availability’, ‘volume’, ‘recurrence’, ‘thematic coherence’, ‘historical plausibility’, ‘history of interpretation’, and ‘satisfaction’.<sup>91</sup> In terms of ‘availability’, some of the

<sup>90</sup> Moyise, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation*.

<sup>91</sup> Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 29-32.

echoes lying on the surface of the texts involving the three constructs would have easily occurred to the first century readers. As for the subtle connotations, one would need to assume some proficiency of reading OT text within the churches of Asia Minor. One scenario could be that there were teachers itinerant or otherwise, like John the author, who could explain the meaning to them. In terms of '*volume*', one can see that the number of correspondences between the three constructs are not few. The three characters appear to be tightly correlated. In terms of '*recurrence*', one finds other allusions to the Kings narrative in the figure of the Elijah alluded to in the two witnesses. These two witnesses have power over the rain and fire (Rev 11:5-6 cf. 1 Kgs 18: 36-38; 18:1, 41-45). We also see an anti-Elijah figure in the 'beast from the land', which has power to send fire from heaven (Rev 13:13; 1 Kgs 18: 36-38). Moreover, it is significant that Queen Jezebel is mentioned twice (1 Kgs 18:4, 9) in the passage framed by the rain prediction and the rain (18:1 and 18:41-45). This passage, Kgs 18:1-45, has an anti-idolatry focus that my reading of the Great Harlot as goddesses-destroyed also has. Similarly, the author's criticisms of eating idol-food also reflects an anti-idolatry stance. These further points satisfy the test of '*thematic coherence*'. The similar motif of 'queens and goddesses destroyed' in my reading of the murder scene of queen-goddesses-Jezebel and that of the queen-goddesses-Great Harlot also satisfies this criterion. As for the '*historical plausibility*' of the author's meaning, and the readers performing such an interpretation, one can assume that the author of Revelation is a Jew. Given his prolific use of OT texts in his work, he must have been familiar with the OT. Not only does he use isolated descriptions, he also uses larger motifs such as the plagues of Exodus, the temple vision in Ezekiel, to name only a few. His usage of the OT spans the breadth of the OT. He appears to be more than a casual reader of the OT. If he is an itinerant teacher writing to the seven churches, he could also have had the chance to explain what he meant to them. As for the reception of the 'woman at the window' figure as goddess Astarte, I explain later that Aphrodite (nevertheless, also a goddess) could also be conjured by a first century reader (ch. 8, §3). As for the '*history of interpretation*' criterion, I admit that the reading that interacts three woman-constructs polemically is novel. I guess it has not been performed before in the way I have. But at least some scholars have noted a polemic inherent between pairs of the three. For example, Duff's book (*Who Rides the Beast?*) explores the polemical associations between the Great Harlot together with other characters in Revelation, and the prophetess 'Jezebel'. A polemical

association between the name 'Jezebel' and that of Queen Jezebel has also been pointed out.<sup>92</sup> Finally, in terms of the subjective criterion of '*satisfaction*',

[D]oes the proposed reading make sense? Does it illuminate the surrounding discourse? Does it produce for the reader a satisfying account of the effect of the intertextual relation?<sup>93</sup>

I answer in the affirmative. In this reading, a hidden and subtle polemic becomes heard against the prophetess. It not only gives depth to the anti-idolatry stance in Revelation, it gives another element of coherence to Revelation, particularly between content in the 'letters' (ch. 2-3) and the 'vision narrative' (ch. 4-22; or simply called the 'visions'). In all, most of the criteria have been met to certain degrees. One can also see the task as a presentation of a particular 'potentiality of the text' (adopting Moyise's phrase).<sup>94</sup>

Finally, I can say that the overall effort of the studies in the whole thesis has not been futile. The polemic of Revelation becomes concrete and alive.

### **3. About Dating Revelation**

Every study of Revelation that involves work on the socio-historical background has a section on the question of its date. Here, it is no different. But the main contours of polemic that I read against the so-called 'Jews' and prophetess 'Jezebel' do not hang heavily on it. To some extent, however, the issues brought up during Domitian's time give some insight to the period following when the letters were believed to be circulated.

In Aune's broad survey, among scholars

from the late second century A.D. until the nineteenth century, and again (after an interval of a century of criticism) in the twentieth century, the prevailing opinion has been that Revelation was written toward the end of the reign of the Roman Emperor Domitian (A.D. 81-96), i.e. A.D. 95....<sup>95</sup>

Presently, the Domitianic dating receives a strong following so much that when the hypothesis of Domitianic persecution fell out of favour, the concept of a 'perceived

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<sup>92</sup> E.g., see n. 89.

<sup>93</sup> R. Hays, *Echoes*, 31.

<sup>94</sup> Moyise, 'Intertextuality', 16.

<sup>95</sup> David E. Aune, *Revelation 1-5* (WBC 52; Dallas, Texas: Word Books, 1997), lvii



crisis' in Revelation was suggested to explain the lack of a historical persecution.<sup>96</sup> During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a Neronian date prevailed in view of Nero's persecution of Christians and the Jewish War.<sup>97</sup> Scholars gather more at the Domitianic dating for now,<sup>98</sup> but the 'year of the four emperors' (68/69 C.E.) is seeing some supporters. After John Marshall, who will receive some attention below, one very recent proponent of a Neronian date is van Kooten. His arguments have merits, and his method of attention to social-historical resonances and contexts is close to mine. I will interact with him in more detail.<sup>99</sup> There are also isolated suggestions, such as of a date during the reign of Titus,<sup>100</sup> Trajan<sup>101</sup> and Hadrian.<sup>102</sup>

I will bring up some significant arguments raised about the dating, with particular attention to the dominant camps gathering at the Domitianic and the (post-)

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<sup>96</sup> Yabro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 106-7; L. L. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, 27-28.

<sup>97</sup> Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, lvii.

<sup>98</sup> Proponents are: Yabro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 54-83; L. L. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, 13-17; Ben Witherington, III, *Revelation* (New Cambridge Bible Commentary; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 3-5; Colin J. Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting* (Grand Rapids: Mich.: Eerdmans, 1986, repr.1989, 2-5; Carey, 12.

<sup>99</sup> George H. van Kooten, 'The Year of the Four Emperors and the Revelation of John: The 'pro-Neronian' Emperors Otho and Vitellius, and the Images and Colossus of Nero in Rome', *JSNT* 30 (2007): 205-48. A recent book situating the context of Revelation in the year of the four emperors is John W. Marshall, *Parables of War: Reading John's Jewish Apocalypse* (SCJ 10; Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2002). Other proponents for a Neronian date: J. Christian Wilson, 'The Problem of the Domitianic Date of Revelation', *NTS*, 39 (1993): 587-605; Albert A. Bell, Jr, 'The Date of John's Apocalypse. The Evidence of Some Roman Historians Reconsidered', *NTS* (1979): 93-102.

<sup>100</sup> Alan J. P. Garrow, *Revelation* (New Testament Readings; London: Routledge, 1997). His main argument is that of the seven heads/kings, only the first and the eighth constitute 'the beast' (and its double). The reign of all other heads/kings do not constitute the beast *as present*. Now, even if one adopts this premise, one does not find support in the text for his designation of the first head as 'the beast' (at least, not in 17:9-11 when the heads are counted). Garrow also neglects the author's double use of the imagery of 'the beast' to stand both for Roman power, bearing all seven heads/kings (13:1), and to a particular emperor (17:7-8, 11). In 17:8, a particular beast carrying the Great Harlot is in question (this one is no longer present). In 17:11, a specific eighth king is introduced. In these specific designations, the beast is further qualified ('τὸ θηρίον ὅ...', in 17:8, 11; τοῦ θηρίου τοῦ βασιλεύοντος, 17:7).

<sup>101</sup> Aune dates the final redaction of Revelation to the end of Domitian's time, or more likely to early Trajanic time. Aune, lviii. He does not elaborate further on this suggestion. The main proponent of a Trajanic period is de Jonge, 276-90. His main reason for the dating is the prominence of the imperial cult in Asia Minor during Trajan's reign. A fuller study with regard to the imagery in the 'letters' and the 'visions' for Trajanic elements is needed.

<sup>102</sup> Thomas Witulski, *Johannesoffenbarung und Kaiser Hadrian: Studien zur Datierung der neutestamentlichen Apokalypse* (FRLANT 221; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007). Though it cannot be ruled out, a Hadrianic date appears quite late.

Neronian date of the ‘year of the four emperors’. As some arguments are less determinative than others,<sup>103</sup> I will give attention to the more significant ones. Particularly, I will highlight how the results of my chapters enter into the discussion, and how they lead me to a date of Revelation’s circulation slightly after Domitian’s time.

### 3.1 Internal evidence for dating Revelation

#### 3.1.1 Babylon as Rome

A strong piece of evidence indicating a post-70 C.E. date is the connotation of ‘Babylon’ as Rome in Revelation (14:6; 16:19; 17:5; 18:2, 10, 21).<sup>104</sup> Most scholars agree that the city ‘Babylon’ in Revelation refers to Rome (or in part). There is a minority who ascribe ‘Babylon’ to Jerusalem.<sup>105</sup> The use of ‘Babylon’ as Rome assumes in Rome the attribute of the destroyer-of-Jerusalem. This is the main characteristic that commends the use of ‘Babylon’ for Rome in Jewish Christian literature (e.g., 1 Pet 5:13; *Sib. Or.* 5.143, 159; 2 *Bar.* 11.1; 67.7).<sup>106</sup> This argument is one of the main points forwarded by the proponents of a Domitianic date. However on this alone is not sufficient to argue for such a date. It can rather point generally to a date quite sometime after Jerusalem was destroyed. Even though Jerusalem fell in 70 C.E. It must have taken some time for the admittance of an irreversible fate to settle in the minds of Jews, certainly at least some time after the fortress at Masada had fallen in 73 C.E.<sup>107</sup> Only when lingering hopes of resurgence were quelled did ‘Babylon’ likely become a code-name that was popularly understood for Rome.

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<sup>103</sup> For example, the argument about the temple in Rev 11 can go both ways, either for those who think that the historical temple was still standing (a pre-70 C.E. date) or that it was no longer present at the point of composition of the book (a post-70 C.E. date). See argument in Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 141-3. The argument that Domitian issued an edict restricting viticulture (Suet. *Dom.* 7.2; 14.2) has been used to support a date of 93 C.E. But such a famine situation has been also applied to other periods. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, lxiii.

<sup>104</sup> Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 76; also Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, lxi.

<sup>105</sup> E.g., Alan James Beagley, *The ‘Sitz im Leben’ of the Apocalypse with Particular Reference to the Role of the Church’s Enemies* (Berlin; New York: W. de Gruyter, 1987); J. Massyngbaerde Ford, *Revelation: Introduction, Translation and Commentary* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1975).

<sup>106</sup> Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 76 and 57-58; Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; NICNT; Grand Rapids: Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1990), 202. Similarly, Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, lxi.

<sup>107</sup> Nachman Ben-Yehuda, *The Masada Myth: Collective Memory and Mythmaking in Israel* (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 228.

### 3.1.2 Some phrases echoing other books

There may be some late elements in the text. Aune observes the rare use of οἱ δώδεκα ἀπόστολοι (Rev 21:4), which occurs elsewhere only in Matt 10:2 and as *variae lectiones* (Luke 9:1; 22:14). He notes that the phrase occurs in the short and long titles of the *Didache*. Aune infers that if Matthew is composed, for example, in 80-95 C.E., the date of Revelation would be late and not early. ‘The twelve’ (οἱ δώδεκα), rather, is the common term to denote the twelve apostles in the gospels.<sup>108</sup>

Ben Witherington III remarks:

There is evidence of knowledge of some of the sayings of the historical Jesus. Yet if Revelation is written at or around A.D. 69-70, none of the Gospels were likely yet extant.<sup>109</sup>

Unfortunately, he does not elaborate as to what sayings of the ‘historical Jesus’ he refers to. Perhaps, he means the ‘Jesus of the Gospels’? We see the prominent concept of the ‘lamb that was slain’ in Revelation (5:6, 12; 7:14; 13:8) used in the Gospels. There Jesus is presented as the sacrificed Passover lamb (Mark 14:12; Luke 22:7; John 1:29, 36). Granted the concept is also present in 1 Cor 5:7. This could date the concept to an earlier time than the Gospels. But it appears that the concept is used more frequently in the Gospels. It seems that the book of Revelation is situated within the vocabulary and thought of Gospels in this respect.

The name of Jesus as the ‘ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ’ in Revelation (19:13) echoes the concept of the reincarnated λόγος in John 1:1, 14. This reference to λόγος as the person of Jesus only occurs in these two places in the NT. Though one cannot be sure of a relation of causality, the resonance is direct and loud at this point.

A clear connection with Hebrews is the ‘sharp double-edged sword’ (τὴν ῥομφαίαν τὴν δίστομον τὴν ὀξεῖαν) that proceeds from Jesus’ mouth (Rev 2:12, 16; cf. 19:15). In Hebrews, the ‘word of God’ (ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ) is presented as ‘sharper than any double-edged sword’ (τομώτερος ὑπὲρ πᾶσαν μάχαιραν δίστομον; Heb 4:12). As the ‘mouth’ speaks the ‘word’, the ‘mouth’ and the ‘sword’ are married (incongruously) in Revelation. Even though different words are used for the ‘sword’ (ῥομφαία; μάχαιρα) and ‘sharp’ (ὀξύς; τομός), the linkage of concepts is evident. One notes also that the title ‘king of kings and lord of lords’ (Βασιλεὺς

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<sup>108</sup> Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, lxiv.

<sup>109</sup> Witherington, 4.

βασιλέων καὶ κύριος κυρίων) in Rev 19:16 occurs in one other place in the NT, namely 1 Tim 6:15. In both places, Jesus is given the title. These correlations would depend on when one dates Hebrews<sup>110</sup> and the letters to Timothy.<sup>111</sup> Though some of these associations are inconclusive with regard to the matter of date, certain late terms and concepts are used in Revelation, such as λόγος, echoing the Gospel of John, and the δώδεκα ἀπόστολοι which is a later development to ‘οἱ δώδεκα’ that is commonly used in the Gospels. From literary echoes, we now move on to socio-historical echoes in the text.

### 3.1.3 Echoes from the Claudian to Domitianic period

Van Kooten’s recent attempt to date the book to the year of the four emperors (68/69 C.E.) is impressive. It is based on a mostly coherent reading, except at one critical point,<sup>112</sup> of prominent images from around the Neronian period used in Revelation. But this dating would not best fit a common reading of ‘Babylon’ as a code-name for Rome, which requires a post-70 date. The lack of direct/clear evidence of such a usage before 70 C.E. makes his suggestion less forceful than the notion of Rome as ‘Babylon’ could ‘have been made as early as 66-67 C.E., at the beginning of Nero’s suppression of the Judaeen revolt’.<sup>113</sup>

Van Kooten’s close study of socio-historical echoes is commendable. His method is close to the one I employ in making sense of Revelation: using socio-historical echoes to illuminate images therein. He sees prominent Neronian images in Revelation as an indication of the date of the book. But I will point out that the dating issue is less straightforward. Possibilities of different periods vie for attention in the same images.<sup>114</sup> I show in the following chapters that images of Revelation

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<sup>110</sup> There is uncertainty surrounding the date of Hebrews with perhaps a *terminus ad quem* of the 90s C.E. The letter was known to Clement of Rome, whose epistle is traditionally dated to the mid 90s. Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1993), 29; Andrew T. Lincoln, *Hebrews: A Guide* (London; New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 40.

<sup>111</sup> The issue is complicated and intertwined with the issue of apostolic or post-apostolic authorship. See Philip H. Tower, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 2006), 9-25.

<sup>112</sup> There is one glitch in the conflict of identities of the eighth king and two beasts, for which van Kooten tries to give an explanation. See n. 131 below.

<sup>113</sup> Van Kooten, 220.

<sup>114</sup> See e.g., the Great Harlot’s representation; ch. 7.

allude to or echo entities/personalities from the time of Claudius to Domitian, and that the Flavian period is also prominent in the images besides the Neronian one, even for the moment accepting van Kooten Neronian postulations. In my reading, Nero's mother (ch. 7, §1), the first Jewish war (ch. 2, §2), Emperor Titus (ch. 2, §§2-3), and the Flavian emperors as a whole and their cult (ch. 3) all occur in the depictions of Revelation. These connotations in the images uncovered have been insufficiently noticed. Now, if depictions echo/allude to elements from Claudian up to the Domitianic time in distinct terms, how early/late should one then date Revelation?

Some methodological reflection is needed here. The polyvalence of images in Revelation prevents the identification of echoes in a particular period *to the exclusion of suitable ones* of other periods. Conflation of images and generalizations are also observed in Revelation. For example, the beast who 'once was, and now is not' is 'an eighth king' (18:11). At the same time, the beast with its seven heads (17:3, 9-10) is a whole entity representing a conflation of emperors, and represents imperial authority. Moreover the beast, who is the eighth king, and who is often identified with a particular emperor, is depicted as an eschatological beast that fights the final battle with Jesus Christ (19:19-21). The beast is at that point generalized into an ultimate anti-Christ figure. So one sees a specific denotation, conflation, and generalization in a single image.

Van Kooten argues that Nero's statue and the funerary sacrifices offered to Nero by Otho and Vitellius (the two-horned 'beast from the land' in his suggestion), as well as Nero's Golden House and Colossus in Rome, are being alluded to the worship of the image of the beast in Rev 13.<sup>115</sup> While this is possible, I suggest that the two-horned beast can also be Domitian in his promotion of the Flavian cult, and the 'Satanic trio' (Rev12-13) that draw from the three Flavian emperors as a model (ch. 5). Could the images I suggest and those of van Kooten's be interlaid upon one another? Polyvalence, which is common in Revelation's images, allows for this possibility.<sup>116</sup>

Van Kooten objects to the idea that imperial cult at large is behind the depiction of Rev 13:14-15 on the grounds that only one image is consistently

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<sup>115</sup> Van Kooten, 217, 221-225.

<sup>116</sup> This is certainly not to say that all images in Revelation are polyvalent.

mentioned.<sup>117</sup> On the one hand, one can understand the singular image to mean, literally, the one image of a particular emperor, which van Kooten suggests to be the colossal stature of Nero, or in my suggestion, the colossal statue of Titus (ch. 3, §1). On the other hand, I allow worship of beast to be a more figurative way of depicting the imperial cult which includes a number of images in a temple. Furthermore, close attention to the text would indicate that the image which is worshipped belongs to that of the beast *in its second life* (i.e., Nero-*redivivus* or *rediturus*<sup>118</sup>), rather than to Nero himself. The reason is this: its rise from the sea/abyss is the point in which the beast relives/returns (13:1; 17:8).<sup>119</sup> The beast in Rev 13 has ten horns already crowned at the point of its rise in 13:1. This corresponds to the revived/returned beast with whom the ten horns reign (are crowned) for a short time in 17:12-14. It is also the beast (in the same 'life') that makes war with Jesus Christ in an eschatological battle (ch. 19:19-20). Thus, the colossal statue of Titus (the beast in its second life) that I suggest is preferable to the statue of Nero as the image. Even so, the image could have alluded to both the colossal statues of Nero and Titus. Revelation's images are observed to bear several layers of echoes (e.g. see my the reading of the Great Harlot; ch. 7).

Aune suggests a way out of the various possibilities by acceding to an extended editing process from the 60s to the 90s.<sup>120</sup> A reason for this idea of editing/redaction is that Aune sees the book as imperfect in its unity and coherence, while accepting coherence at 'some levels of composition'.<sup>121</sup> But those who see a masterful unity in the work probably would not think that a long process of edition is likely or necessary. Bauckham writes:

Revelation has been composed with such meticulous attention to the detail of language and structure that scarcely a word can have been

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<sup>117</sup> Van Kooten, 231-34. His other reason of rejecting the imperial cult at large to be alluded to in the depiction of Revelation (rather simply that of 'Nero'-worship) is because of the lack of references to the cult and themes related to it in the 'letters'. Instead, one finds echoes in the letters to Neronian elements. Van Kooten, 234-40. While I do not object to the echoes to Neronian elements, there may be echoes to non-Neronian elements as well, so it may not be appropriate to draw the line there. As for the absence of the imperial cult in the 'letters', the 'letters' do speak against those holding a certain syncretistic way of life. As I show in Chapter Six, eating idol-food can happen in context of pagan and imperial worship.

<sup>118</sup> The term '*rediturus*' (returned) is preferred by van Kooten, 207.

<sup>119</sup> Sea = abyss. See ch. 2, §1.4, para 2.

<sup>120</sup> Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, lviii.

<sup>121</sup> Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, cviii.

chosen without deliberate reflection on its relationship to the work as an integrated, interconnected whole. The source-critics of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, who divided Revelation into a number of disparate sources incompetently combined by an editor, could do so only by crass failure to appreciate the specific literary integrity of the work as it stands. This has been widely recognized in more recent study, which has stressed the literary and ideological unity of the book.<sup>122</sup>

As Bauckham observes, '[T]he astonishingly meticulous composition of the book creates a complex network of literary cross-references, parallels, contrasts, which inform the meaning of the parts and the whole.'<sup>123</sup> If one accepts the point of the masterful design in the book—and I see this the more I work with the narrative<sup>124</sup>—it is more likely that details from different periods are incorporated together in one writing.

#### 3.1.4 The count of emperors in Rev 17:10-11 and the eighth king

For scholars who see the seven heads of the beast referring to individual emperors, a count of emperors would make sense (Rev 17:10-11). Such a count has variously begun with Julius Caesar or Augustus with different combinations of the emperors considered.<sup>125</sup> As yet, there is no agreement on how to go about a sure identification of the eighth king/'beast from the sea-abyss'. The other common way for judging the denotation of this character would be to find an emperor who was nicknamed 'Nero', such as, Domitian, called the bald-headed Nero (Juv. 4.38),<sup>126</sup> and Titus, called another Nero to-be (Suet., *Tit.* 7.1). I suggest that a surer way to the identification, or a way to confirm an identification is not to start with the clue in 17:10-11, nor the appellation of 'Nero', which could have been used on any notorious emperor, but from an examination of the intratextual clues and from attention to socio-historical

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<sup>122</sup> Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, x.

<sup>123</sup> Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 18.

<sup>124</sup> I show in Chapter Two the well-organized structure of Revelation that provides at certain points commentary between the sequences and the insert sections. Thompson interprets the linguistic unity of Revelation at the narrative, metaphoric and mythic levels. Leonard L. Thompson, 'The Literary Unity of the Book of Revelation', in Vincent L. Tollers and John Maier (eds.), *Mappings of the Biblical Terrain: The Bible as Text* (*Bucknell Review* 33; Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1990), 347-63; also L. L. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, 37-73.

<sup>125</sup> See J. C. Wilson, 599-602; van Kooten, 209-214. A chart presents many suggested ways of counting in Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 947-48.

<sup>126</sup> Van Kooten, 208.

echoes. The intratextual connections provided by the implicit commentary between Rev 12-13 and 9:1-11 (little noticed so far) give the following two sets of equivalence:

- (1) the dragon inducting the ‘beast from the sea-abyss’ (13:1-2) is equivalent to the fallen star (12:9, 13) opening the shaft of the abyss, inducting an angel-king and his army (9:1; cf. 13:1).
- (2) the ‘beast from the sea-abyss’ (13:1; 17:8) is equivalent to the ‘angel-king from the abyss’ commanding an army (9:2, 11).

The ensuing siege-cum-battle commanded by this angel-king in the first and second woes (9:1 ff.) echoes details in the Jewish war (66-70 C.E.).<sup>127</sup> Through extratextual connections, I further establish that Titus, the Jerusalem-conqueror, is alluded to in the figure of the ‘beast from the sea-abyss’.<sup>128</sup> He is, then, the eighth in the list of emperors, who is also commonly interpreted as the Nero *redivivus*. So starting backwards, we have the following count:

- 8<sup>th</sup> Titus
- 7<sup>th</sup> Vespasian
- 6<sup>th</sup> Galba/Otho or Vitellius
- 5<sup>th</sup> Nero...
- 1<sup>st</sup> Augustus

If Titus is the eighth (and I think there is sufficient support to establish this firmly), Vespasian will be the one ‘who must remain for a little while’. Vespasian reigned from 69-79 C.E. and eleven years is not a short while. But it is possible to understand ‘ὀλίγον αὐτὸν δεῖ μέναι’ (17:10) as way of describing euphemistically an unbearable period. It could have meant ‘*It is necessary* (δεῖ) for him to be around for a while—but it will be over soon’. The ‘short while’ could mean ‘quite some time’ in this light. The ‘δεῖ’ may indicate the need for some form of patience. The Flavians, especially Vespasian and Titus could be notorious to the Jews for their defeat of Jerusalem and for the former’s institution of the *fiscus Judaicus* to finance a pagan

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<sup>127</sup> I do not disregard van Kooten’s identification of another set of echoes in the Neronian time, such as echoes of Nero in his associations with Apollo in the name Ἀπολλύων of Rev 9:11. Rather, I believe that echoes from both periods could have been worked into the depiction at this point.

<sup>128</sup> See ch. 2, §2.



temple.<sup>129</sup> Time categories in Revelation are quite fluid and figurative in depiction. Another example of a euphemistic way of denoting an unwelcome period of time is found in the period of beast's reign. Forty-two (literary) months is expressed as one (figuratively short) hour (13:5 and 17:12).<sup>130</sup> The 'ten days' (ἡμέραι δέκα) that some in the church in Smyrna will experience tribulation is likely also a figurative representation of a short period of time. Following on, Nero is the fifth since he is no longer present at the point when John sees the vision (17:8), and he cannot be the fourth as that would not allow Augustus to be on the list. So either Galba, Otho or Vitellius is the one who is present.<sup>131</sup> If one can accept that a euphemistic expression is possible in 17:10, there is little difficulty against understanding Titus as the eighth king (see ch. 2, §2.3), as the indications in Revelation suggest.

Now, the text does date, whether in *real* or *narrative time*, John seeing the single vision of *the harlot-on-the beast* (17:3-6) in the year of the four emperors. I argue that one cannot with certainty base the composition of the whole work on this date for a number of reasons stipulated (see ch. 2, § 2.3). In addition, I prefer to see a distinction between 'real time' and 'story time' in the 'now' depicted in 17:8. The reason why I still think that the book was composed around end Domitianic time is because of the prominent Flavian echoes/allusions in the book that I have stressed (ch. 2, §2-3 and ch. 3). If there were an absence of allusions to the Flavians, one could have easily taken the 'year of the four emperors' as the point when John saw *all* the visions. But if indeed the Flavian emperors are caricatured—Titus as the 'beast from

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<sup>129</sup> Jerusalem fell under the rule of Vespasian under the hands of Titus. Though one does not know how patriotic Christian Jews in Asia Minor were in the late 90s, but the humiliating defeat of the Jews under Vespasian which is featured in various propaganda on the Flavian victory could be enough to make Vespasian into a public enemy of the Jews (and, perhaps, including some Christian Jews). He further instituted the *fiscus Judaicus* to finance the Jupiter Capitolinus temple in Rome. The issue of the Jewish tax implicating Christian Jews judaizers during Domitian's time was illustrated in Chapter Four.

<sup>130</sup> We know that the rise of the 'beast from the sea-abyss' is the point when the ten kings (ten horns) rule, since the ten horns are depicted with diadems at the beast's rise (13:1). Their end takes place with that of the beast in the battle with the warrior on the white horse (17:13-14; cf. 19:11-21).

<sup>131</sup> I think this delineation is more straight-forward than van Kooten's suggestion of putting Otho and Vitellius as the Nero-*rediturus* (the returned beast from the sea). In that case two emperors will tie for that eighth position, but at the same time in his reading, they are also the 'beast from the land' promoting the worship of the 'beast from the sea' (Nero or themselves?). The way van Kooten, 218, explains this inconsistency does not account for how the two emperors can both be the returned beast from the sea and the 'beast from the land', though he delineation of them as the two-horned beast is ingenious.

the sea' and the Flavian emperors as the 'Satanic trio' (dragon and the two beasts)—the book would likely have been composed during or after Domitian's time.

### 3.1.5 Crisis late in Domitian's time

Presently, scholars have undergone a complete shift on the issue of persecution in Domitian's time from a conjecture of persecution to a rejection of one. J. Christian Wilson<sup>132</sup> observes that the idea of persecution originated from J. B. Lightfoot's commentary on the 'Epistles of Saint Clement'.<sup>133</sup> He names the first three commentaries of Revelation<sup>134</sup> influenced by Lightfoot's argument that Flavius Clemens and Domitilla were accused and sentenced of 'ἄθεότης' for being Christians,<sup>135</sup> and by his compendium of sources indicating persecution.<sup>136</sup> More followed to take on the Domitianic date. Even though scholars now generally accept that there was no visible persecution of Christians during Domitian's time (though I will show that there was a crisis), the Domitianic dating still remains the majority view, amidst a handful of calls for an earlier date.<sup>137</sup> A problem viewed difficult for a Domitianic dating is the lack of evidence for persecution or of a critical situation during Domitian's time. Though it is not the focus of this thesis to challenge this view, observations in Chapter Four of the present thesis show that events during Domitian's late years could have amounted to a period of real crisis for both Jewish Christians and gentile Christian judaizers. Some deduction is needed to see that Christians could be involved in the affairs to a significant extent (see ch. 4.), as none of the non-Christian sources, except Pliny, *Ep.* 10.96,<sup>138</sup> mention Christians being interrogated and sentences around late Domitianic time (some twenty years from the

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<sup>132</sup> J. C. Wilson, 587-597.

<sup>133</sup> J. B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers: Clement, Ignatius, and Polycarp: Revised Texts with Introduction, Notes, Dissertations, and Translations* (London: Macmillan, 1890; repr. Baker Book House, 1981), I, Part 1.

<sup>134</sup> R. H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920); H. B. Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John* (London: Macmillan, 1917); I. T. Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of St John: Studies in Introduction with a Critical and Exegetical Commentary* (New York: Macmillan, 1919).

<sup>135</sup> Lightfoot, 34.

<sup>136</sup> 'Notices of the Persecution under Domitian and of the Family of Flavius Clemens'. Lightfoot, 104-115. J. C. Wilson, 587-88.

<sup>137</sup> J. C. Wilson; Bell; van Kooten.

<sup>138</sup> See ch. 4, §3, para. 1.

time of Pliny's letter). Christians sources, however, traditionally ascribe trouble to Christians during Domitian's time. So let me devote a section to explain a possible crisis implicating Christians.

*Excursus:* A few interrelated events had heightened the stress level of Christian Jews and (gentile) judaizers during late Domitianic years. I suggest that Domitian's rigorous exaction of the Jewish tax (Suet., *Dom.* 12.2) had called for a need to distinguish between payable Jews and non-payable (gentile) judaizers who could previously intermingled without much notice with the synagogal/Judaistic community. These might have been mistaken previously as Jews or Jewish proselytes.<sup>139</sup> Jewish converts to Christianity who maintained Jewish customs were another ambiguous group when it came to their religious affiliation and the matters of tax exaction. The need for distinctions for tax purposes brought to attention those tagging along at the fringes of the Jewish community (ch. 4, §1.1). Some judaizing Christians practicing their faith under the covers of Judaism as an excuse from the imperial cult could have been brought to light.

Suet., *Dom.* 12.2 comments on two categories of people denounced in relation to the tax matter (ch. 4, §1.2): (1) those maintaining Jewish customs, yet who did not profess the Jewish faith; and (2) those who concealed their Jewish origins and did not pay the tax. In the *first* category, (gentile) judaizers and apostate Jews could have been implicated. These were not Jewish converts but for some reasons were keeping the Jewish customs. They could either be of a pagan<sup>140</sup> or Christian faith. Being of the mainstream in terms of plural-theistic outlook, pagans could have easily admitted their religious affiliation and would be released, since they were not liable for the tax. Judaizing Christians and Christian Jews could not have easily admitted their affiliation without possibly facing further charges of *maiestas* (treason) for their non-participation in imperial cult (ch. 4, §1.2.1). Furthermore, there could have been some Christian Jews of the *second* category who did not see themselves as part of the Jewish community and did not pay the tax. They could have sought to hide their Jewish identity and when found out were accused of tax evasion. Apostate Jews who renounced Judaism to embrace pagan deities could have

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<sup>139</sup> For ambiguity in identity, see ch. 4, §1.1, para 5-6.

<sup>140</sup> Using an anachronistic term.

been taken off the tax register (ch. 4, §1.2.2), but Jews becoming Christians, being in a ‘no man’s land’ of the marginalised, could not.

The rigorous exaction of the Jewish tax is further complicated by many accusations of other kinds during the last years of Domitian. Cassius Dio (67.14.2; 68.1.2) writes of ‘many’ (πολλοὶ) keeping Jewish customs or Jewish lifestyle being accused of ἀθεότης or ἀσέβεια. Suetonius writes of the rampant charge of *maiestas*, even for trivial matters (Suet., *Dom.* 12.1). I argue that, out of the ‘many’ accused in relation to Jewish custom/lifestyle and who were further charged of ἀθεότης or ἀσέβεια (Cass. Dio, 67.14.2), there were many Christians. *Jews* could not be rightly charged for keeping Jewish customs/lifestyle, which were their paternal customs, so these ‘many’ charged of ἀθεότης or ἀσέβεια would be mostly Judaizers. Again, Judaizers could be either of a Christian or pagan background. The charge of ἀθεότητος could refer to ‘atheism or godlessness’ or the ‘neglect of state cults’.<sup>141</sup> The charge of ἀσέβεια referred to impiety/ungodliness, which could apply to the worship of pagan gods or a deified emperor.<sup>142</sup> Both charges of ἀθεότης or ἀσέβεια involved reluctance to worship either pagan or imperial deities. Christians who generally adopted a monotheistic stance were very vulnerable to these charges, more so than pagans. The charge of *maiestas* (treason) also easily applied Christians not willing to participate in the imperial cult. Though Judaism was also monotheistic, synagogues had established means of honouring the emperor apart from direct participation in imperial worship (ch. 4, §1.2.3). Furthermore, Judaism was a recognized religion from the perspective of Rome because of its ancient traditions, while the Christian faith was not.

This said, could Christians in *Asia Minor* have been implicated by these matters? The Jewish tax policy was an empire-wide matter, and so the rigorous exaction of the tax would have affected Jews of *Asia Minor*. The false accusations of various kinds were so prevalent that ‘it was in no ordinary manner that everybody was accusing everybody else’ (...γενομένης οὐ τῆς τυχούσης ἐκ τοῦ πάντας πάντων κατηγορεῖν).<sup>143</sup> Moreover, Nerva had to issue a series of coins to indicate the abatement of false accusations. Propaganda through

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<sup>141</sup> LSJ, 31.

<sup>142</sup> LSJ, 255.

<sup>143</sup> Cass. Dio, 68.1.3 (Cary, LCL).

coinage meant that the information was meant to travel widely in the empire. This could indicate how widespread the matter of false accusations was towards the end of Domitian's rule.

In addition, the brief decree by Domitian to seek out Jews of Davidic descendents also affected some Christian Jews (ch. 4, §2), and naturally their Christian community. The social stigma of such a decree could have continued on after the decree was abolished. I submit that the various forces outlined above, together with the pressure from the Flavian provincial imperial cult in Asia Minor in operation from 90 C.E. (ch. 3), had likely contributed to a very stressful period for Christians in Asia Minor in the last years of Domitian's reign. It is significant to add that the establishment of a Flavian provincial temple in Ephesus made the cult 'a greater part of the warp and woof of the life and structure of society than it had been'.<sup>144</sup>

Though accepting date around Neronian times, Christopher Rowland presents the traditional argument for a Domitianic date:

One of the main reasons for continued support of a Domitianic date which was first supported by Irenaeus (*Adv. Haer.* V. 30.3) is the fact that Christians were persecuted by Domitian (Melito of Sardis in Eus. *EH* iv. 26.9), and it is this persecution which John is alluding to, particularly in chapter 13.<sup>145</sup>

Though this view of official persecution of Christians is not held nowadays, he accedes that Christians were among those with Jewish sympathies or connections who were implicated. But he disregards the implication of Christians to be critical.

All this adds up to little more than evidence of harassment of those who were thought to have any Jewish connections (which at this time would almost certainly have included Christians), and a move against certain noble citizens in Rome for their Jewish beliefs. None of this amounts to a systematic attempt to move against the Christians through the empire. What the seer has in mind in Revelation 13 is not an occasional incident when a few individuals took action against local Jews, but a more widespread outburst with some official recognition (13:11ff.) in an attempt to victimize those who did not

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<sup>144</sup> Beale, 15. For the rising prominence of the imperial cult in Asia Minor from the time of Domitian onwards, see Beale, 14-15.

<sup>145</sup> Christopher Rowland, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (London: SPCK, 1982), 407.

acknowledge the emperor by worshipping before his statue (12 and 15).<sup>146</sup>

We in fact agree on the main points that fit the scenario for Rev 13: some kind of crisis involving Christians and the pressure from the imperial cult. Rowland could have underestimated the pressure facing Christians during the period of false accusations. I argue that the issues towards the end of Domitian's reign were more widespread and had implicated more Christians than does Rowland.<sup>147</sup> Reflecting a more literal reading of the depiction in Rev 13, he sees it to reflect a 'persecution' with 'official recognition'. Images of Revelation take elements in real life and transform them. It is not always easy to know how much a transformation of reality is involved. A divergence in interpretation to a matter of degrees is natural. His 'certain noble citizens in Rome' who were accused of adopting Jewish 'customs' (ἔθος<sup>148</sup>) or 'mode of life' (βίος; Dio, 67.14.2; 68.1.2)<sup>149</sup>—not 'Jewish beliefs' as he puts it—could have referred to those, such as Domitilla. Her religious affiliation is under debate, but she could have been a Christian judaizer, since she kept Jewish customs and is claimed by the Christian tradition as a martyr (more in ch. 4; §1.3). Those implicated rightly or wrongly by accusations in relation to the Jewish tax, Jewish custom or lifestyle, charged with ἀθεότητος or ἀσέβεια, and *maiestas* faced the usual sentence of confiscation of property, exile and/or death. It is the lack of 'persecution' of Christians that drives Rowland (and perhaps other scholars) to explore an early date.<sup>150</sup> But if Christians in Rome, or even those in Asia Minor, were significantly implicated, it would account for a possible scenario for a crisis, and one needs to reconsider the matter of an absence of crisis during Domitian's time. Also with the identification of a specific situation of crisis (such as the rampant accusations during Domitian's last years), the matter of whether Domitian had called

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<sup>146</sup> Rowland, 408.

<sup>147</sup> One very recent study that discusses the crisis for Christians caused by the Domitian's rigorous exaction of the Jewish tax and the rampant accusations late in his time is: Marius Heemstra, 'How Rome's Administration of the *Fiscus Judaicus* Accelerated the Parting of the Ways between Judaism and Christianity: Rereading 1 Peter, Revelation, the Letter to the Hebrews, and the Gospel of John in their Roman and Jewish Contexts' (PhD thesis; Universtiy of Groningen, 2009). Our knowledge of each other's work only occurred after the submission of our theses for examination at close intervals, but we share an understanding of the role of rampant accusations as a crisis for Christians during Domitian's time.

<sup>148</sup> The term ἔθος is defined as 'custom' or 'habit'. LSJ, 480.

<sup>149</sup> LSJ, 316.

<sup>150</sup> Rowland, 408.

for divine honours (such as *dominus* and *deus*) would not be too pertinent.<sup>151</sup>

Scholars do not think that he demanded divine honours more than other emperors did.<sup>152</sup>

### 3.1.6 A Crisis during Neronian time

The Jewish revolt of (66-73 C.E.) or Nero's persecution of Christians after the fire in 64 C.E. have been pointed out as circumstances supporting a Neronian date. Scholars opting for the impact of the Jewish revolt as the reason for the book would situate the book and/or the ἐκκλησίαι addressed in Jewish circles. One would have to account for how the Jewish revolt in Palestine could have affected co-religionists or members of the churches in Asia Minor.

Rowland situates the context of Revelation within Jewish circles.<sup>153</sup> He sees

Jews and Jewish sympathizers ...under great pressure in the Diaspora to dissociate themselves from the position of their co-religionists in Palestine. In this situation it would not be surprising to find many Jews apostatizing, and, on occasion, the imperial cult may have been used as a device whereby Jewish loyalty to Rome could be tested.<sup>154</sup>

Christians 'had probably very little to distinguish' themselves from the Jews in the sight of outsiders 'until the end of the first century'. As such, they suffered the 'repercussions' of the pressures Jews faced.<sup>155</sup> The social unrest or pressure Christians faced in Asia Minor as a result of the war in Palestine remains to be shown.

Unlike Rowland who suggests Revelation to be addressing the effects of the Jewish revolt on both Jewish and gentile Christians within the churches, John Marshall situates Revelation and the communities addressed totally in the 'Jewish', or more accurately, the 'Judaistic',<sup>156</sup> circle; Jesus is, hypothetically, a figure embraced by a group/sect in Judaism. He reads the message in Revelation in the

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<sup>151</sup> Cf. Witherington, 5. The previous importance regarding this question for scholars lies in whether it is possible to establish a Christian persecution/crisis based on this point.

<sup>152</sup> See Beale, 9-12; Duane Warden, 'Imperial Persecution and the Dating of 1 Peter and Revelation', *JETS* 34 (1991): 203-12, see 204-8; Thompson, 104-7.

<sup>153</sup> Rowland, 408-9. Also, Marshall.

<sup>154</sup> Rowland, 412.

<sup>155</sup> Rowland, 409.

<sup>156</sup> That is, within Judaism.

context of the first Jewish revolt as a religious and political resistance against Rome and the 'wider Greco-Roman cultural complex'.<sup>157</sup> The Jewish revolt is then for Marshall the main event undergirding the depictions in Revelation. Marshall

endeavoured to sketch a cultural milieu in which some Diaspora Jews could quite plausibly have had high expectations for the city of Jerusalem in its conflict with the Roman army and could quite easily have been instigators of strife with or targets of harassment by their neighbours in the Hellenistic cities of the Roman Empire.<sup>158</sup>

While this may be so, would such Jews be a predominant part of the churches addressed? To view the book and its addressees within the circles of Judaism, one needs to clarify the 'Christian' images, such as the 'Lamb that was slain' and worshipped (Rev 5:12; 13:8). The kind of Judaism embracing such concepts would need to be clarified. The idea that Revelation is a work within Judaism, and a resistance literature supporting fellow co-religionists in Palestine (both politically and religious-ethically) would also create more questions than can be easily answered.

The persecution of Christians in Rome under Nero after the fire in 64 C.E. (Tac. *Ann.* 15.44)<sup>159</sup> does not come in as a strong evidence for persecution/crisis in Asia Minor. Beale comments:

There is no evidence that Nero's persecution of Christians in Rome extended also to Asia Minor, where the churches addressed in the Apocalypse are located. But John may have seen the outbreak of persecution in Rome as the first step of expanding persecutions elsewhere in the Empire.<sup>160</sup>

Though it cannot become the underlying crisis for churches in Asia Minor, nevertheless the news of fellow Christians suffering in Rome could have been a shocking one. It may be possible that such an image is adsorbed into the depictions of suffering in Revelation. But besides this, it is not clear how relevant the persecution in Rome was to the church context in Asia.

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<sup>157</sup> Marshall, 175.

<sup>158</sup> Marshall, 119, 172-73.

<sup>159</sup> For an analysis of the matter, see F. W. Clayton, 'Tacitus and Nero's Persecution of the Christians', *CQ* 41 (1947): 81-85.

<sup>160</sup> Beale, 12.



### 3.2 External evidence to dating Revelation

Evidence of Irenaeus (*Haer.* 5.30.3) who was born in Asia Minor,<sup>161</sup> along with Eusebius (*Hist. Eccl.* 3.18.3) after him, attests that the apocalyptic vision was seen towards the end of Domitian's reign (96 C.E.).<sup>162</sup> If we take this piece of information to be accurate, John could have viewed the vision completely by 95/96 C.E. and written the work after that. According to ancient authors, John was released from exile after the death of Domitian in 96 C.E. The succeeding emperor, Nerva, had allowed those who were exiled unjustly to return home (*Hist. Eccl.* 3.20.11; also in Cass. Dio, 68.1.1). The earliest Latin commentary by Victorinus of Pettau (*ca.* 270) dates John's receipt of the revelation to the reign of Domitian, with the additional information that John was 'condemned to the labour in the mines by Caesar' at Patmos. It also adds that the revelation received was delivered (presumably to the churches) after he was dismissed from the mines (10.11). Similarly, Jerome writes of John's exile during Domitian's time and his return to Ephesus after the death of Domitian, but differs in saying that John *wrote* (not 'saw') the Apocalypse during exile (*Vir. Ill.* 9). In an isolated attestation, and for reasons unknown, Epiphanius dates Revelation to the reign of Claudius (*Haer.* 51.12.2; 51.33.8), which appears too early a date for the work. In a 11<sup>th</sup> century attestation, Theophylact (*Praef. In Ioann;* on Matt 20:22) dates the work to Neronian or Trajanic time. But this attestation is very late.<sup>163</sup> The predominant early church tradition attests to a Domitianic time for John's receipt of the revelation.

Yarbro Collins, as with R. H. Charles, sees strong external evidence for the date given by Irenaeus.<sup>164</sup> But some scholars doubt the accuracy of the Domitianic dating because Irenaeus attributes the author of Revelation to John the Apostle (e.g., *Haer.* 4.20.11),<sup>165</sup> and because he remarks that the vision was seen almost in his generation ('σχεδὸν ἐπὶ τῆς ἡμετέρας γενεᾶς';<sup>166</sup> Euseb., *Hist. eccl.* 3.18.3), when

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<sup>161</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 17.

<sup>162</sup> Beale, 20, for refuting the interpretation that it was 'John' who was seen in Domitian's time and not the apocalyptic vision.

<sup>163</sup> Charles, I.xcii. See also Aune, lxi-lxiii. Beale surveys internal evidences that point towards an earlier date but as he observes, none of them necessarily holds. Beale 20-26.

<sup>164</sup> Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 76; Charles, vol. I, xciv.

<sup>165</sup> J. C. Wilson, 597-98; Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 56.

<sup>166</sup> LCL, Lake.

about a century has passed since Domitian's time.<sup>167</sup> Alan Garrow, opting for a date during Titus' reign,<sup>168</sup> objects to the reliability of Irenaeus' account because John would have, based on Moberly's calculation, seen the apocalyptic vision '80-95 sketchily charted years earlier' than when Irenaeus wrote of him. This translates to '35 sketchily charted years, or so, before...Irenaeus was born'.<sup>169</sup> But does these few decades before Irenaeus not fit what he said about John seeing the vision nearly in his generation, that is, not long ago in the generation before? Garrow speculates that Irenaeus could have dated Revelation to around 95 C.E., and not earlier, to enhance the credibility that Polycarp (in his teens at that time), who was later in contact with John, had actually no knowledge of the number of the beast. Irenaeus, according to Garrow, was disputing with the Gnostics that such an identification has never been known.<sup>170</sup> Even if this were so, Garrow does not explain why 95 C.E. was picked as the date, and not slightly earlier, nor later during Trajan's time when Polycarp was likely in contact with John in Asia Minor.<sup>171</sup>

Of course, one cannot be totally sure of the veracity of the accounts of the church fathers at every point, nor can one date Revelation certainly based on them. But I suspect that the main problem that perhaps led scholars to doubt the patristic evidences is their portrayal of Domitian as the second persecutor of Christians after Nero,<sup>172</sup> and that the idea of a persecution during Domitian time has fallen out of favour.<sup>173</sup> Although I agree that Domitian did not decree any persecution of Christians, his image as the 'persecutor' could have occurred to Christians if they had suffered under his reign directly or indirectly due to any of his policies or his perverse attitude. I suggest that Christians (Jewish and gentiles) were implicated in relation to the Jewish tax issue, and the rampant false accusations due to his avarice for financial gain. His brief hunt on Davidic descendants had implicated Christians, such as the descendents of Jude, the brother of Jesus, and probably caused some

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<sup>167</sup> Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 143.

<sup>168</sup> See n. 100.

<sup>169</sup> Garrow, 67.

<sup>170</sup> Garrow, 68.

<sup>171</sup> Irenaeus, *Haer.* 3.3.4.

<sup>172</sup> Melito of Sardis in Euseb, *Eccl. Hist.* 4.26.9; Tert. *Apol.* 5.3-4; cf. Euseb., *Hist. Eccl.* 3.20.9. For other questions raised against the patristic evidence, see Gonzalo Rojas-Floras, 'The Book of Revelation and the First Years of Nero's Reign', *Biblica* 85 (2004): 375-92, see 376-78.

<sup>173</sup> See Garrow, 70.

amount of unease among the churches (see ch. 4). I note here that such a period of rampant accusations which implicated Christians may not be far from the false accusations that Melito of Sardis', *Apology to Marcus Aurelius*, describes:

The only emperors who were ever persuaded by malicious men to slander our teaching were Nero and Domitian, and from them arose the lie, and the unreasonable custom of falsely accusing Christians.

Μόνοι πάντων, ἀναπεισθέντες ὑπό τινων βασκάνων ἀνθρώπων, τὸν καθ' ἡμᾶς ἐν διαβολῇ καταστήσαι λόγον ἠθέλησαν Νέρων καὶ Δομετιανός· ἀφ' ὧν καὶ τὸ τῆς συκοφαντίας ἀλόγῳ συνηθείᾳ περὶ τοὺς τοιούτους ῥυῖναι συμβέβηκε ψεῦδος.<sup>174</sup>

While we do not know exactly what was the ψεῦδος referred to, it could have simply referred to the 'falsehood' of the false accusations. This description reminds us of the rampant false accusations during Domitian's time that implicated Christians. One is not sure if the circumstances in this text fit with the accusations in relation to the Jewish tax, the charges of adopting Jewish customs/lifestyle, 'ἀσέβεια', 'ἀθεότης' and *maiestas* during Domitian time described elsewhere. Domitian might or might not have been involved in the charges as is depicted here. In any case, the oppressed could have attributed the pressures to the emperor. The situation described by church fathers of Domitian as the second persecutor of Christians after Nero in fact fits the prominence of Neronian and Flavian image in the beast in its first and second lives.<sup>175</sup> With an identifiable crisis during Domitian's reign, there does not, then, seem to be any pressing necessity to discredit the common attestation to a Domitianic date espoused by ancient commentators (Irenaeus, Jerome, Eusebius and Victorinus).

Van Kooten's motivation to consider a Neronian period as the backdrop for images in Revelation stems from his 'unease...that the assumption of a Domitianic date for Revelation is essentially dependant on external patristic evidence....'<sup>176</sup> He is right that without an identifiable Domitianic crisis nor the depictions that could allude to the Flavian period, this seems to be the case. While an end/post-Domitianic date of writing and a post-Domitianic date of circulation do not act as the basis of my

<sup>174</sup> Recounted by Clement of Alexandria, and narrated by Eusebius. Euseb, *Eccl. Hist.* 4.26.9 (Lake, LCL).

<sup>175</sup> See my reading and van Kooten's reading, respectively. It is beyond to scope of this thesis to explore a possible interlay of images in Neronian time and Domitian's time.

<sup>176</sup> Van Kooten, 208.

thesis, the results attained in studies performed (chs. 2-4) have convinced me that major depictions in Revelation can be interpreted as alluding/echoing quite substantially to the Flavian period. The internal evidence include:

- (1) Titus as the 'beast from the sea/abyss', who brings the Flavian dynasty into the picture (ch. 2),
- (2) echoes to three Flavian emperors in the 'Satanic trio' and their cult (ch. 3),
- (3) the social pressure from the Flavian cult right at the door step of the churches in Asia Minor from 90 C.E. (ch. 4), and
- (4) a crisis of rampant and uncontrolled false accusations in the last years of Domitian's reign, which was deemed to have affected Christians to a significant extent (ch. 5).

In this light, the traditional date of end Domitianic time for seeing the visions, as attested to by the majority of the external evidence, has much to offer for one's understanding of Revelation. And the internal evidence, as I have suggested, concurs in the main with it.

If my observations that images up to at least the Flavian period are present, such as Titus and the other Flavian emperors depicted as beasts and a dragon, the subversive caricaturing Flavian emperors (ch. 2, §2.2 and ch. 3) would have created problems for the author and its recipients if the work were circulated during the Flavian dynasty. If John was suffering for the faith, as he remarked (Rev 1:9), he likely had enemies out there waiting to do more harm to him. The fact that he had survived Domitian's rule (Euseb., *Hist. Eccl.* 3.20.11) suggests that the work was delivered to the churches only at the very end of Domitian's reign or later. The recent crisis in turn serves a didactic purpose to encourage continued endurance and faithfulness in the churches even in normal times.

#### **4 Limitations and strengths of the thesis**

The introduction has been long for a reason: to give the needed framework for reading the following chapters. Given the complexity of the issues within a polemic, the polyvalence of images in Revelation and a limitation of space for a full exploration, my socio-historical reconstructions of background and the study of socio-historical co-'texts' in interaction with the text will necessarily be selective. The thesis mainly involves working with interacting socio-historical co(n)texts. I see

social-historical interaction as complimentary to a literary kind of intertextuality. Indeed Kristeva sees inter-‘textuality’ as involving also extralinguistic elements.<sup>177</sup> One may ask: ‘How much of one’s suggested social-historical echoes/allusions could have been picked up by the original readers?’ Instead of submitting the judgement to a theory of inter-‘textual’ criteria yet to be developed for socio-historical echoes/allusions, I hope the reader can assess the overall probability in light of the summative power of the individual propositions.

The individual parts of the thesis stand as studies that also build upon one another to provide the necessary historical and imagistic moorings for interpretation. These individual studies have either opened up new grounds or have probed settled ideas to call for a re-examination. Titus, the Nero-*redivivus*, is alluded to in the ‘beast from the sea-abyss’; Nero’s mother in the face of the Great Harlot; and the Flavian ‘three’ in the Satanic trio. These figures had almost been unnoticed in the images of Revelation, yet the connections are as ‘loud’ as they can be, while remaining covert. Though the circumstances of the churches in Asia Minor seem to reflect more or less normal times with the occasional trouble, there is reason to think that the crisis at the end of Domitian’s time in the form of severe calumny affecting not just Jews, but also Christians and the mighty and wealthy (not mutually exclusive categories), could have been a background to the depictions of suffering in Revelation, which is narrated in the visions through the voice of John. The prominence of the Flavian images and the occasional trouble of blasphemy or slander one detects in the ‘letters’ make me think that the book was circulated slightly after the troubles have subsided after Domitian’s death. These events, still fresh in the mind of the readers, were used as paint for the images for the author’s didactic purpose. The prophetess named ‘Jezebel’ is a figure that cannot be traced to a known person. But one can postulate certain things about her, as well as the social contexts in which the paired offences advocated would have seemed alluring. She is not only castigated in an outright manner in the ‘letter’, she is painted with the brushstrokes of the Great Harlot and an OT counterpart. I highlight aspects little noticed in the woman-image of the Great Harlot. She is, in one respect, a conflation of Graeco-Roman queens and goddesses. The polyvalence of her imagery has caused scholars who look for *the* answer, when she actually connotes a conflation of multiple entities. Her long string of epithets

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<sup>177</sup> See e.g, n. 34.

reveals this. The OT reading of Queen Jezebel reveals undercurrents of an anti-idolatry polemic, this polemic is particularly poignant at her death scene. She is unveiled in the depiction of a fallen ‘woman at the window’, and stands for the goddess Astarte debunked. Her roles as a queen mother and ‘great lady’ parallel those of another goddess, Asherah, whose prophets she hosts. Both the queen leading Israel to idolatry and the goddesses reflected in her depiction are rewarded with a grisly end that is ridden with sarcastic sexual overtones.

The individual studies, which provide these insights, are drawn upon for input to study the polemic against separate contenders. The interpretation of the polemic against the *so-called* ‘Jews’ introduces new aspects for understanding the polemical issue. I show how the the synagogue as the ‘attractive other’, the judaizing trend in the Empire that is even noticed by non-Christian writers, the pressure of the imperial cult in Asia, and the pejorative depiction of the tefillin worn by outsiders to Judaism as the mark of the beast all fit together with the author’s stance of non-alliance with the synagogue. Those who affiliate with either the synagogue or the imperial cult are relegated to the camp of Satan and the beasts.

In terms of the polemic against the prophetess ‘*Jezebel*’, I highlight, particularly, the subtle yet ‘loud’ polemic against prophetess through a specific web of derogatory associations involving three woman-constructs crossing two Testaments. In these chapters, the polemic against two separate groups of contenders is put into perspective. The relationship between the polemic against the ‘Jews’ and ‘*Jezebel*’ is further seen in light of each other in a section of the final conclusion.<sup>178</sup>

Finally, the contributions of the thesis are not limited to only highlighting less considered co(n)texts nor making original yet, I grant, possible/plausible readings. One distinctive character of the method is that the conclusions reached were mostly ‘built up’ from the ground. It is from surveying the ‘ground’ of the text and its social-historical world that discoveries can be made and issues relooked. Besides reaping certain new (or renewed) observations, the thesis also points towards a kind of social-historical co(n)textual approach, whose methodological framework has been highlighted above in relation to ‘intertextuality’ of a broad sense. The usefulness of this method is demonstrated in its fruits of discovery. Apart from the usual socio-historical reconstructions that may help one interpret a text, points of interaction

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<sup>178</sup> Ch. 10; §2.1.2.

(echoes, allusions, denotations and connotations) between images and the social-historical world have become 'keys' to unlock the slippery metaphoric images of Revelation. The points of contact between uncovered images and their elicited co(n)textual elements create new platforms for further critique and study.

## Chapter Two: Narrative Structure and Historical Anchorage

As a preparatory step to the reading of the polemical context in Revelation, I start off with a study of the structure of the ‘visions’ (chs. 4-22) in Revelation. A sufficient understanding of the structure allows me to make a connection with the social-historical world it reflects. The socio-historical connection gained towards the end of this chapter becomes the first brick in the social-historical connections and constructions in the following chapters. The first section of the chapter helps one to grapple with the intricacies of the narrative structure, just sufficiently to make a historical connection. Such a connection is made in the second section based on clues in the narrative. The chapter closes off in the third section with a brief discussion on any implication the result has for dating Revelation.<sup>179</sup> The first hand-hold on the slippery images of Revelation is developed upon in the subsequent chapters, leading to a fuller understanding of the polemic against the so-called ‘Jews’.

### ***1. The Structure of the ‘Vision Narrative’ (Rev 4-22)***

Revelation’s narrative drama in chapters 4-22 is a literary masterpiece made up of complicated intratextual relationships and a intricate narrative framework. Though the characters in the visionary drama seem so ‘other worldly’— monsters and a great harlot— one is repeatedly reminded to seek the faces of known personages or entities behind the faces of these characters. Glosses permeate the narrative to help the reader do this. One well-known gloss gives the ‘beast from the sea’ a human face. It more specifically points to an emperor by the gematria of his name (13:18; 17:10-11). Hints for identification are dropped throughout the book: the ten horns on the beast’s head signify ten kings (17:12); the great harlot seated on ‘many waters’ (ὑδάτα πολλὰ) is predominantly a city (17:15, 18); the ‘many waters’ are ‘peoples, multitudes, nations and languages’ (λαοὶ καὶ ὄχλοι; 17:15); the seven golden lampstands are ‘seven churches’ (ἐπτὰ ἐκκλησίαι; 1:20). Polyvalence is also present in some of the images, such as the ‘seven heads’ (ἐπτὰ κεφαλὰι) of the beast, which denote seven Roman emperors and seven hills of Rome (17:7, 9-10). The Great Harlot, I would suggest, is an elusive image because of its polyvalence. It takes on both a woman and a city image. Her polyvalence is revealed in the changeable entities she sits upon: first on ‘many waters’ (17:2), then on a beast (17:3) and finally

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<sup>179</sup> Dating issues were also discussed in Ch.1, §3.



‘seven hills’ (ἐπτὰ ὄρη; 17:9). Her identity alters as the entity with which she is associated alters. Her changeable signification is like the changing pattern in a kaleidoscope.<sup>180</sup> But no matter how polyvalent and multi-layered we take the images in Revelation to be, one cannot deny that the author expects his readers to take his referential cues to socio-historical entities seriously and intelligently (cf. 13:18; 17:9). Though different images in Revelation have different degrees of remoteness to historical events/personages and different degrees of specificity in their reference, it is believed that certain correlations exist between the literary portrayal and socio-historical entities in the Graeco-Roman world.

### 1.1. Broad structure of the vision narrative section

We observe that the structure of the ‘vision narrative’ (which I delineate as 4:1-22:21<sup>181</sup>) can be delineated into four sequences: A/seal<sup>182</sup> sequence (4:1-7:17), B/trumpet sequence (8:1-11:19), C/bowl sequence (15:5-19:10), and a F/final section (19:11-22:6). An I/major insert section (12:1-15:4) interrupts the continuity between the trumpet and the bowl sequence.

The reasons for such a delineation are as follows. There are major disjunctions at the seams of each of these sequences. At 4:1, we see a change from epistolary to narrative genre and a spatial translation from earth to heaven.<sup>183</sup> Chapters 4-5 can appear to be an integral part of sequence A, setting the context for the opening of seals. Though there are narrative joints at 7:1 and 7:9, they mark lower level units (7:1-8 and 7:9-17), which are included in the broader framework of

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<sup>180</sup> Huber highlights the mapping of multiple concepts onto an image in Revelation. See her application of ‘conceptual metaphor’, Huber, 78-88, and throughout.

<sup>181</sup> For simplicity, this narrative section ends at the closing benediction (22:21). Another term I use to denote the section is ‘visions’ in short in contrast to the ‘letters’ (Rev 2-3).

<sup>182</sup> The seventh seal goes together with the seven trumpets. For convenience, I call the six seals (4:1-7:17) the ‘seal sequence’ and the seventh seal and seven trumpets (8:1-11:9) the ‘trumpet sequence’.

<sup>183</sup> A ‘Μετὰ ταῦτα’ heads the section. It possibly functions to gather up preceding events (‘ταῦτα’, plural) as a set, and proceed on to a new set of events, thus the phrase plays a segmenting function. Similar uses of ‘Μετὰ ταῦτα’ heading macro narrative units can be observed in 7:8, 15:5, 18:1, 19:1. Other factors are also taken into account in delineating narrative sequences. These considerations include temporal progression, and other signals of continuity (numbered sequences or a consistent formula heading units like ‘Καὶ εἶδον’), discontinuity (e.g., an insert section) and grouping (e.g., the three woes, 8:13). Besides, different indicators may indicate narrative units at macro and micro levels of discourse.

the seal sequence.<sup>184</sup> The seal sequence leads up to the final time of the descent of a new Jerusalem (7:15-17, cf. 21:4, 6; 22:3). For this reason, I have delineated the second sequence from 8:1. A major insert section, 12:1-15:4, disrupts the continuity between the bowl and trumpet sequences with a unique introduction, ‘Καὶ σημεῖον μέγα ὥφθη ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ’ (12:1). It consists of a loose collection of visions without numbering or indication of temporal progression. All the major units in it, except the first, open with a standard formula ‘Καὶ εἶδον’ (13:1; 13:11; 14:1; 14:6; 14:14; 15:1).<sup>185</sup> There is also a framing device reflected in the introduction of the first and last units:

12:1, Καὶ σημεῖον μέγα ὥφθη ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ

15:1, Καὶ εἶδον ἄλλο σημεῖον ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ μέγα καὶ θαυμαστόν

These two units, thus headed, act to wrap up the whole insert section.

The trumpet-bowl sequence, interrupted at 12:1, resumes at 15:5 (a major seam is marked by ‘μετὰ ταῦτα’ at 15:5). There are clear links between the seventh trumpet (11:15-19) and the following bowl sequence (15:5-19:10):

- (1) The end-unit of the trumpet and beginning unit of the bowl sequence both describe the opening of the temple in heaven (11:19 and 15:5).
- (2) The sounding of the seventh trumpet in 11:15 initiates the overturning of the seven bowls in 15:6-7.
- (3) The description of ‘flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake and a great hailstorm’ (ἀστραπαὶ καὶ φωναὶ καὶ βρονταὶ καὶ χάλαζα μεγάλη) in 11:19 foreshadows an enactment of the seventh bowl consisting of ‘flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder’ (ἀστραπαὶ καὶ φωναὶ

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<sup>184</sup> Similarly, Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 21. Bauckham’s seal sequence extends to 8:5 to include the seventh seal. I tend to delimit the sequence up to 7:17 where the narrative reaches the end time. So I include the seventh seal initiating the trumpets (8:1-5) as part of the introductory material to the B/trumpet sequence. For convenience, I call A without the seventh seal the ‘seal’ sequence.

<sup>185</sup> Bauckham also supports 12:1-15:4 as unit. See Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 16, 17, 18 and 22. Similarly, Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation* (HDR 9; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1976), 14 and A. Farrer, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), 47-9.

καὶ βρονταὶ), ‘a severe earthquake’ (σεισμὸς...μέγας; 16:18) and ‘huge hailstones’ (χάλαζα μεγάλη; 16:21).

Bauckham reflects the above points concisely: ‘15:5 echoes 11:19a and 16:17-20 expounds 11:19b.’<sup>186</sup>

- (4) Furthermore, the three woes (8:13) organize the trumpet and bowl sequences as a set. The three woes are, respectively, the last three trumpets leading into the seven bowls (11:18b):<sup>187</sup>

First woe = fifth trumpet (9:1-12)

Second woe= sixth trumpet (9:13-11:14)

Third woe = seventh trumpet/seven bowls (11:15; 15:5-18:24)

- (5) The trumpet-bowl sequence stretches temporally, again, till the ultimate narrative time. It depicts elements in the final scenes of Revelation:<sup>188</sup> the wedding of the Lamb (19:7 cf. 21:2), and the closing elements, such as mistaken angel-worship (19:10; cf. 22:8-9), blessings (19:9, cf. 22:7, 14), repeated references to Jesus’ testimony (19:10, cf. 22:16) and ‘prophecy’ (19:10, cf. 22:7, 10).

From the above, there are two sets of sequences reaching end-time: the seal sequence (6:1-7:17) and trumpet-bowl sequence (8:1-11:19 and 15:5-19:10). As such, the vision narrative is organized as follows:

Part One: A/Seal sequence: 4:1-7:17 (reaches end-time)

Part Two: B/Trumpet sequence: 8:1-11:19 (to be continued)...

I/Major insert section I: 12:1-15:4 (unnumbered visions)

C/Bowl sequence: 15:5-19:10 (continued from B and reaches end-time)

F/Final section F: 19:11-22:6 (unnumbered visions; reaches end-time)

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<sup>186</sup> Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 9 and 16.

<sup>187</sup> Bauckham rightly points out that the three woes (8:13a) refers to the fifth, sixth and seventh trumpets, since they are attributed to ‘the trumpet blasts about to be sounded by the other three angels’. (8:13b). Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 11. Similarly, Charles Homer Giblin, ‘Recapitulation and the Literary Coherence of John’s Apocalypse’, *CBQ* 56 (2006): 81-95, see 92-3.

<sup>188</sup> For a similar delimitation of the final section as 19:11-22:21, see Charles H. Giblin, ‘Structural and Thematic Correlations in the Theology of Revelation 16-22’, *Bib.* 55 (1974): 487-504, see 490-91.

We thus see recapitulative and forward developmental strands.<sup>189</sup> There are also insert sections to the sequences functioning to provide elaboration (and acting as implicit commentary) on some events mentioned in the sequences. One such example is the major insert section 12:1-15:4.

## 1.2. Structure of the major insert section I (12:1-15:4)

We look at the relationship between the major insert section, I (12:1-15:4), and the trumpet-bowl sequence, B-C (8:1-11:19 and 15:5-19:10). The seven units in insert I are organised in two parts. The first part centres on the Satanic trio (a dragon and the two beasts) and their attack on a celestial woman and the saints.

### Part One:

12:1-18	The dragon and the celestial woman
13:1-10	The beast from the sea
13:11-18	The beast from the land

The second part involves a section that is framed by two ‘victorious’ scenes of the followers of the Lamb (14:1-5 and 15:1-4) in heavenly settings before the throne (14:3; 15:2, cf. 4:6).

### Part Two:

14:1-5	The victorious with the Lamb before the throne
14:6-13	Three proclamations of angels
14:14-20	Two harvests
15:1-4	The victorious saints with the Lamb before the throne

## 1.3. Structure of the final section F (19:11-22:21)

The final section (19:11-22:21) begins with a great temporal disjunction (19:11) from the preceding narrative. This is because the preceding sequence has already led up to the end-point in time (cf. 19:7-10). This final section consists of a series of unnumbered visions headed by ‘καὶ εἶδον’<sup>190</sup> (similar to 12:1-15:4)<sup>191</sup>:

First unit: a battle of beasts with a warrior (19:11-21);

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<sup>189</sup> For recapitulation in the visions, see Beale, 116-32.

<sup>190</sup> The phrase ‘καὶ εἶδον’ is also used to head smaller units in these sections (such as at 19:17, 19; 20:4; 11). The phrase making major units are usually accompanied by changes in setting and characters.

<sup>191</sup> In 12:1-15:4, all major units except the first are headed by ‘καὶ εἶδον’ (13:1; 13:11; 14:1; 14:6; 14:14; 15:1).

Second unit: the casting, releasing and final destruction of the dragon/devil/Satan framing the millennium rule (20:1-10: 20:1-3, 4-6, 7-10);

Third unit: judgement before the great white throne (20:11-15);

Fourth unit: the descent of a new Jerusalem (21:1-22:21).

All of them, except the fourth unit, end with the description of various bad characters cast into the lake of fire (19:20; 20:10; 20:15). In the fourth unit, this detail occurs mid-unit (21:8).<sup>192</sup> This final section, unlike the numbered sequences, is akin to the unnumbered visions in the major insert section (12:1-15:4), which are not organised in a temporal sequence. However, some form of temporal relationship between the visions in it may be present:

- (1) Events in the *third* unit follow those in the *second* chronologically, since the ‘second death’ (ὁ θάνατος ὁ δεύτερος ; 20:14) follows the ‘first resurrection’ (ἡ ἀνάστασις πρῶτος; 20:6). Besides, the earth (and sky) is described as fleeing from God in the third unit (20:11), whereas it still exists in the second (see 20:8, 9). We also see the new Jerusalem descending (*fourth* unit) after the judgement before great white throne (*third* unit). There is no longer any sea in 21:1, whereas the sea still exists in 20:13. Based on the above, events in units two to four happen sequentially.
- (2) There may be overlapping elements in the *fourth* unit (the scene of the new Jerusalem, 21:1-22:21) and a part of the *first* unit (the battle with the warrior, 19:11-21). The ‘great supper of God’ (τὸ δεῖπνον τὸ μέγα τοῦ θεοῦ) seems to be another portrayal of the ‘wedding supper of the Lamb’ (τὸ δεῖπνον τοῦ γάμου τοῦ ἀρνίου, 19:9). We see the armies of heaven participating in the battle dressed in ‘white, clean fine linen’ (βύσσινον λευκὸν καθαρὸν, 19:14), similar to the bride’s wedding gown of ‘bright clean fine linen’ (βύσσινον λαμπρὸν καθαρὸν, 19:8). In this battle scene, both the bride (the armies of heaven/the saints, 19:14, cf. 19:8) and the bridegroom (the Faithful and True/the Word of God, 19:13) are

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<sup>192</sup> Here, the lake of sulphur is portrayed differently the second time (22:15, cf. 21:8) as the realm outside the new Jerusalem.

present. There is wine (19:15) and meat (19:21) and invited guests (19:17, cf. 19:9). It seems that the author is mapping the descent of the new Jerusalem and this battle scene on to each other. In this case, then, there may be some overlap in narrative time between them.

- (3) Not only is the first unit depicted as in parallel time to the fourth; one questions whether the battle accounts, 19:1-21 and 20:7-10 (of *first* and *second* unit) refer to the same battle. In the first unit, the opponents destroyed are ‘τὰ ἔθνη’ (the nations; 19:15). If we read the two accounts as referring to two separate battles, we shall have a problem of a ‘second’ destruction of ‘the nations’. These were still present and deceived by the dragon in the second account (20:3, 8) and are again destroyed in 20:8-9. It may be possible that the nations deceived and destroyed in the later battle account (20:7-10) are from the ‘four corners of the earth’ (τέσσαρες γωνίαι τῆς γῆς; 20:8, 9), whereas those in the former account (19:11-21) are a more restricted group. The kings of the earth (=ten horns; 19:19, cf. 17:12-14) represent a group of kings restricted to the reign of the beast/the eighth king (17:11). But even the nature of the eighth beast is generalized and reflective of the ultimate tyrant ruling till end times. ‘All the inhabitants of the earth’ (πάντες οἱ κατοικοῦντες ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, 13:8), who worship the beast, are synonymous with ‘the whole world’ (ὅλη ἡ γῆ, 13:3). Hence, it is likely that the forces fighting in the first and second battle accounts against Jesus Christ/God and the saints/beloved city are similar in magnitude. The armies of the ‘kings of the earth’ (οἱ βασιλεῖς τῆς γῆς; 19:19) can be drawn from the ‘inhabitants of the earth’/‘the whole world’, who are the supporters of the beast.

There are indications that both battle accounts speak of the same battle on the same ‘great day of God Almighty’ (τῆς μεγάλης ἡμέρας τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ παντοκράτορος, 16:14). The *first* battle account describes Jesus Christ ‘coming’ as a warrior (19:11-14), treading the winepress ‘of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty’ (τοῦ οἴνου τοῦ θυμοῦ τῆς ὀργῆς τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ παντοκράτορος, 19:15). Such a coming of Jesus is juxtaposed with the preparation for the battle on the great day of God Almighty (16:14-15). Thus, it can be said that the sixth bowl forecasts the

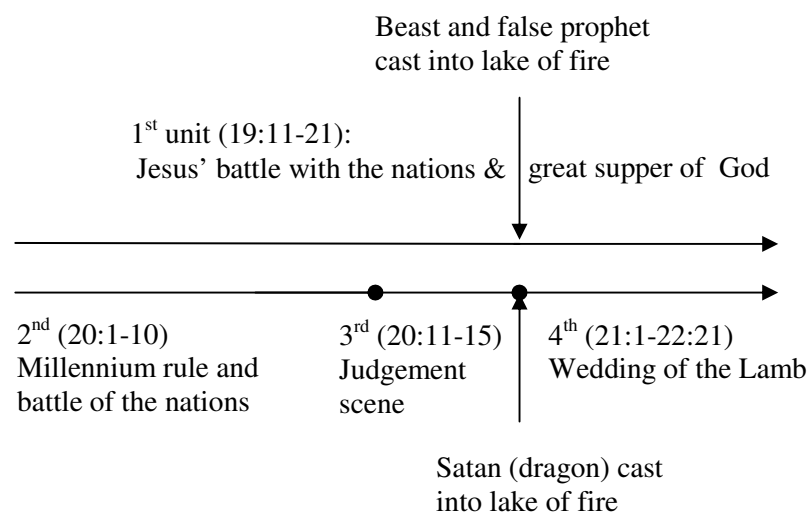
battle in 19:11-21 with the coming of Jesus, as a warrior on a white horse. The *second* battle account (20:7-10) also has close links with 16:14 that indicates the cosmic scale of the war: forces are gathered from ‘the whole world’ in 16:14 and the ‘four corners of world’ in 20:8-9. There is also a reference to the evil spirits from the dragon/Satan deceiving the nations to gather for battle in the sixth bowl (16:13-14, 16). In 20:3 and 20:7, Satan is described as having deceived the nations in the four corners of the earth (20:7) to a cosmic war against God’s people. Therefore, 20:7-10 may be another description of the battle forecast in 16:13-14.

Given the interwoven connections between the battle prepared and forecast in 16:14 and the accounts of 19:11-21 and 20:7-10, we conclude that there is only one battle fought on the great day of God’s wrath. In the two descriptions of this same battle, we see all the members of the Satanic trio cast into the lake of fire (19:20; 20:10).

- (4) Reading the first two units (19:1-21 and 20:1-10) as overlapping in time explains the odd detail in the first unit about the warrior ‘shepherding’ (ποιμαίνω) the nations with an ‘iron sceptre’ (19:15b). Shepherding is not usually congruent with battle imagery. In the first unit, Jesus Christ appears with his victorious armies of heaven/the saints (17:14). In the second unit, the saints and Jesus Christ rule over the nations (20:4; cf. 19:3; see especially 2:26-27). The odd shepherding imagery in the midst of a battle account begins to make sense. The image of ‘shepherding’ with an iron sceptre (19:15, cf. 2:26-27; 12:5) could refer to the ‘judgement’ (κρίμα) and ‘ruling’ (βασιλεύω) during the millennium (19:4). It is noted that the millennium period is presented as after the ‘coming’ of Jesus Christ on a white horse (19:15, future tense of ‘ποιμανεῖ’), but before the final battle (20:7).
- (5) The *sixth* seal describing the great day of divine wrath also shows the removing of sky/heaven pictorially like a scroll ‘split open’ (ἀπεχωρίσθη) and rolled up (6:14a), and the moving of mountains and islands (6:14b). This ‘splitting open’ of the sky/heaven is connected with ‘the great day’ (ἡ ἡμέρα ἡ μεγάλη) of the wrath of God and the Lamb (6:14-17). Curiously, this detail about sky/heaven ‘splitting open’ corresponds to detail about the heaven having been opened (τὸν οὐρανὸν

ἡνεωγμένον) in 19:11 (first unit of F). Thus, the account in 19:11-21 describes the great day of divine wrath that is described in the sixth seal. The fleeing of the sky/heaven and earth also takes place at the scene of the great white throne of judgement (20:11). This indicates that the judgement scene (third unit) also takes place on the great day of wrath. This further supports the parallel time between the first unit and other units of the final section.

In sum, we see that the second, third and fourth units follow a temporal progression. Furthermore, there are corresponding details in these three units and the first unit. It follows that the three units and the first unit are parallel in time. It is likely that the first and the second units both reflect the same battle on the great day of divine wrath. This great battle ends in the two accounts of it with the destruction of the two beasts and Satan/dragon respectively (19:11-12; 20:10). This total annihilation of God's enemies ushers in immediately the great supper and wedding of the Lamb. It follows that the other components in the second and third units, such as the millennium and the judgement before the great white throne, fall into place within these temporal markers as follows:



**Figure 2 Structure of the final section (19:1-22:21)**

More specifically, the 'coming' of Jesus Christ forecast in 16:15 and played out in the coming of the rider on a white horse (19:11, in first unit) inaugurates the millennium rule (20:4-6, second unit), in which Jesus is present with the saints (20:4). From the figure, the first unit (19:11-15) contains all the different elements in corresponding units. The millennium rule expressed by the verb ποιμανεῖ (19:15b,



in future tense, first unit) would signal the impending reign of Jesus' followers (βασιλεύσουσιν, 20:6; second unit). The battle of Jesus' camp against that of Satan is a major part of the first unit, and corresponds to the battle in unit two (20:7-10). This consists of treading the great winepress of God's wrath (14:19; cf. 19:15) on the great day of God Almighty (16:14). Jesus 'treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty' (19:15). Thus, the battle described here in the first unit cannot be any other battle than that on the 'great day of God Almighty' forecast in 16:14. The battle is featured again in the second unit (20:7-10). The judgement of the great white throne is hinted at in 19:11, where Jesus, the warrior on a white horse, is described to 'judge' (κρίνω), along with making war. The wedding of the Lamb in the fourth unit corresponds to the great supper of God of the first unit.

#### 1.4. Three-and-a-half-year periods and the beast from the abyss-sea

Part One of the major insert I (chs.12-13) is seen to elaborate on events in sequence B (8:1-11:19). For example, the 42-month and 1260-day periods are mentioned in both sections (12:6; 13:5 and 11:2-3). The two 3 ½-year periods are seen as an important organizing schema.

At this point, it is necessary to point out that the abyss and the sea in Revelation are meant to be analogous. The beast that comes up of the abyss in 17:8 can be identified with the 'beast from the sea' in 13:1, given similar descriptions about its ten horns and seven heads (17:8; cf. 13:1-3). According to 17:8, the beast's rise from the abyss is the reason for the astonishment of the inhabitants of the earth at the beast. In a parallel description in 13:1, 3, the whole world is astonished at the beast's fatal wound that is healed at its rise from the 'sea'. Assuming that there is only one time of 'death' of the beast (i.e., one time when the beast 'is not', 17:8), then the 'abyss' (ἄβυσσος) and 'sea' (θάλασσα) are made analogous. Furthermore, in 17:12, the beast which comes out of the 'abyss' (17:8) receives a kingdom together with the ten horns. This event of the ten horns assuming power is depicted at the time when the beast rises from the 'sea' in 13:1. We see ten horns with crowns already on them at that time (13:1). So the event of the beast rising from the sea and abyss is the same event.

The beast rises from the abyss-sea at the beginning of the 42 months, the duration of his reign (13:5). In this 42-month period, the beast exercises its authority in a blasphemous way (13:5). It is worshipped by the whole earth (13:3-4) and

persecutes the saints (13:7). Besides, the beast also destroys the Great Harlot/Babylon (17:16). Its 3 ½-year reign ends in the final battle with Jesus Christ.

In the 1260-day period before the beast emerges from the abyss, the two witnesses could prophesy freely and had power to destroy their opponents (11:3, 5-6).<sup>193</sup> As the ‘beast from the abyss’ is given power over the saints to conquer them, it is unlikely that the 1260 days of prophecy by two witnesses would coincide with the 42 months of the beast’s rule (13:7; cf. 13:10). Thus, the 1260-day period should precede the 42-month rule of the beast. This 1260-day period is also the time when the dragon tries to harm the celestial woman to no avail (see 12:18-13:1). Just as the two witnesses could prophesy freely and have power to harm their enemies (11:5-6), and are thus ‘protected’ in a sense, the celestial woman is protected from harm by the dragon in this period (12:6; 12:14).

In another instance, part one of major insert I (chs. 12-13) helps to explain events in sequence B (8:1-11:19). This is particularly significant for making a historical connection. The Satan/dragon, who is cast down from ‘heaven’ (οὐρανός) to the ‘earth’ (γῆ) in a battle with Michael the angel (12:7-9), introduces a beast-king from the sea-abyss (13:1). He appears to correlate with the star fallen from ‘heaven’ to the ‘earth’, which releases an army from the abyss commanded by an angel-king (9:1, 11 of sequence B). Note that in a short passage of 12:1-18, we see the fall of Satan emphasized four times (12:4, 9, 10, 12, 13 of insert I). One wonders why so much attention is given to this fall. As the fall of Satan and his angels are often referred to as falling stars in the Jewish/Christian tradition,<sup>194</sup> there seems to be an

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<sup>193</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Mich.: Baker Academic, 2002), 414.

<sup>194</sup> There are a few reasons to think that this is a likely connection. Osborne (pp. 361-62) writes:

We know from 1:20 that stars are often a symbol of angels (see also Judg. 5:20; Job 38:7; 1 Enoch 88:1; T.Sol. 8:2-11; 18:1-42 for stars personified as angels).... Many believe this has to be a demon (see Kiddle, Walvoord, Sweet, Boring, LaVerdiere 199:607), perhaps Satan himself (Swete, Hendrikson, Chilton), for he is described as “fallen from the sky,” and this fits the imagery of Rev. 12:7-9, where the “dragon and his angels” are cast out of heaven “to the earth,” as well as Luke 10:18, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.” This image could build on Isa. 14:12-14, which described the king of Babylon as “fallen from heaven” and describes him as the “morning star...cast down to the earth.” This passage from Isaiah was later applied to Satan (2 Enoch 29.4-5; Adam and Eve 12, 15-18; cf. 1 Enoch 86.3; 88.1-3; 90.24-26). Also, there could be an *inclusion* with the “angel of the abyss” in 9:11, framing the fifth trumpet with the actions of Satan. Beale (1999:491-92) feels strongly that this is an evil angel sent from God and argues that always in the OT and Jewish writings a “falling star” refers to a fallen angel.

See also Beale, 491-92.

intended connection between the fallen Satan in 12:7-9 and the star having fallen (πεπτωκότα) in 9:1.<sup>195</sup> The ‘fall’ of the star is portrayed in the perfect tense. This just completed action may denote the result of the dragon/Satan’s battle with Michael in 12:7-9 .

Now, if the fallen star in 9:1 is indeed Satan, then his act of inducting the army and their commander-king (βασιλεύς) from the abyss (9:1, 11) corresponds well with the dragon/Satan’s act of introducing a ‘beast from the sea’ (12:18). This beast is also a commander king (βασιλεύς, 17:9-11) going to war (13:4, 7). The same verb ‘ἀναβαίνω’ is used for the smoke ‘rising’ from the abyss, unleashing an army and its king (9:2-3),<sup>196</sup> and for the beast ‘rising’ from the abyss-sea (11:7; 13:1; 17:8). A battle situation is evident in the description of the locust-like army in 9:7-11, with breastplates, horses, chariots and attacking mechanisms. A siege of five months may possibly be reflected here when people are attacked and tortured but not killed (9:5-6, 10, more below).<sup>197</sup> Though one may see the ‘angel’ of the abyss as a spiritual being, he is more likely a man, who is ‘king’ (βασιλεύς) and commander over a human army. A swamp of locusts in the OT is used to describe an invading army (see Jer 51:27; Joel 2:25; cf. Joel 2:1-11), just as the locusts in Revelation ‘looked like horses prepared for battle’ (9:7). In addition, coded information is given to both the name of the commander-angel-king in chapter nine (called Abaddon/Apollyon; 9:11)<sup>198</sup> and the commander-beast-king in chapter thirteen (the gematria of his name is 666, 13:18; the beast goes to war, 13:4, 7). Since the ‘beast rising from the abyss-sea’ is a very important character in the visionary narrative, it is not unlikely that the ‘angel of the abyss’ (ὁ ἄγγελος τῆς ἀβύσσου) is another portrayal of this beast. The similarities between the two pointed out above suggest this. The beast is featured both in the sequences and in greater detail in the focal scenes of the major insert section (13: 1-18; 14:9-13; 15:2; indirectly, 14:9).

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<sup>195</sup> If this fallen star is taken to be Satan/dragon, its fall from the sky to earth continues into the abyss (20:3). The fall of stars/fallen angels in Jewish/Christian traditions sometimes extends from heaven to the abyss (*I En.* 18:11-16; 86:1-3; 88:1-3; 90:23-26).

<sup>196</sup> Though unstated, the king likely appears from the abyss out of the smoke together with his army (9:11).

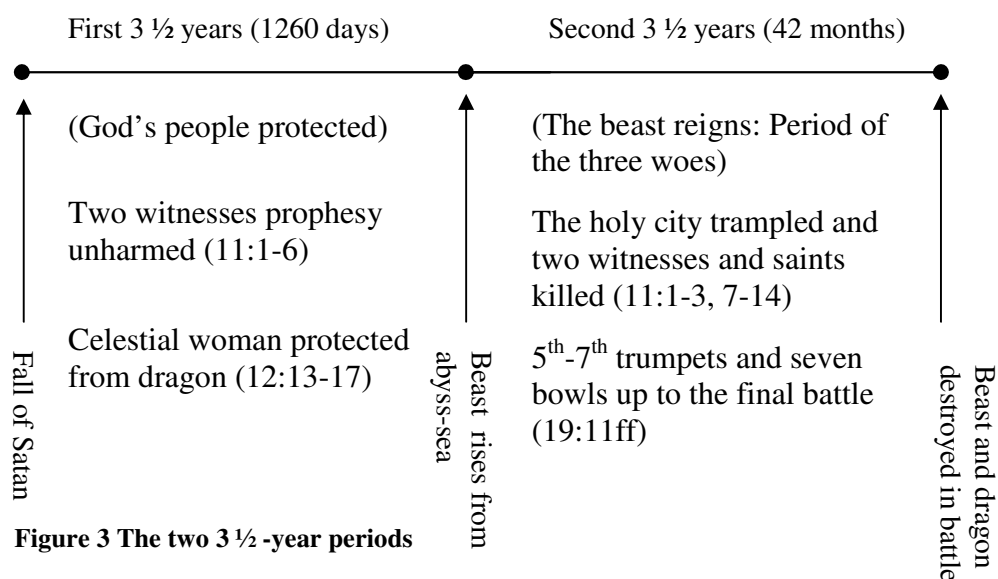
<sup>197</sup> How could one think of a war without fatalities other than a siege situation?

<sup>198</sup> The term ‘Ἀπολλύων’ (the particle of ἀπολλύμι) has the same meaning as the Hebrew ‘אַבְדֹּדֹן’. The name of the deity Apollo, whose symbol is the locust, is derived from this word. But it may simply refer to the ‘destroyer’ of Jerusalem, who is Titus.

If the ‘beast-king’ and the ‘angel-king rising from the sea-abyss’ are identical, we can specify that the beast rises from the abyss-sea at the beginning of the first woe/fifth trumpet when the star (or dragon) opens the shaft of the abyss (9:1-3, 11). We also know that its 3 ½-year reign ends at the final battle with Jesus Christ, at the end of which the beast and the false prophet are thrown into the lake of fire (19:20). Thus, the 3 ½-period of rule of the beast stretches over three woes (fifth, sixth, and seventh trumpet that subsumes the seven bowls), including the destruction of Babylon (chs. 17-18 of the seventh bowl).

With this in mind, we look at the 42-month trampling of ἡ πόλις ἡ ἁγία (the holy city; 11:2). Granted that parts of 10:1-11:14 (which is like a semi-insert section) bear uncertain temporal connections with the second woe/sixth trumpet, structurally speaking, the passage forms an integral part of the second woe. We see that the second woe (9:13-11:14) includes structurally this section. The second woe begins at 9:13 following a reference to the completion of the fifth trumpet (first woe) and a forecast of two coming woes (9:12), and ends with a reference to the completion of the second woe at 11:14. Besides, though the semi-insert section begins at 10:1 with vague temporal connections to 9:13-21 (the beginning part of the second woe), it aligns temporally with the completion of the second woe towards the end when a tenth of the great city falls (11:13-14). The rise of the beast from the abyss in the semi-insert unit (11:7) brings us temporally back to the beginning of the first woe when an army and its king are released from the abyss.

As mentioned above, it is likely that the 1260-day period when the two witnesses are free to prophesy refers to a period prior to the rise of the ‘beast from the abyss’, because the ‘beast from the abyss’ has authority over the saints (including the two witnesses) to kill them (11:7; 13:7). The 1260-day period (of prophecy) prior to the rise of the beast from the abyss would concur with the 1260-day period after Satan is hurled to the earth and pursues the celestial woman. During this period, he pursues the celestial woman (12:13-17) up to his introduction of the ‘beast from the sea-abyss’ (13:1). The chronology of events can be presented in a diagram:



## 1.5. Close relationships between the three woes

### 1.5.1. Connections between the first and second woes

The text reveals a close relationship between the *first* and *second woes* through corresponding features that connect them. Both woes appear to involve the context of a war (9:7-10 and 9:15-19; cf. 11:2), even though the second woe involves also an earthquake (11:13). There is also a repeated mention of horses (9:8, 9 and 9:17, 18, 19), breastplates (9:9 and 9:17) and similar attention to details of the heads (9:7 and 9:17, 19), teeth/mouth (9:8 and 9:17; 18, 19) and tails (9:10, twice, and 9:19, twice) of the horses. The depiction of the first woe gives more attention to the facial features of the army (9:7-8), perhaps because the forces there are not supposed to be lethal (9:5); whereas in the second woe, emphasis is on the attacking power of the troops (9:15, 17-19). The first woe may describe a siege-like situation, in which forces are readily engaged in some preliminary attack, yet not directly in a head-on combat. The forces have no power to kill. They can only torture (9:5). The second woe appears to involve a head-on battle following a siege, in which huge casualties are incurred (9:18). Literary connections between the two woes are as follows:

First Woe (9:7-10)	Second Woe (9:17-19)
Horses, 9:7	Horses, 9:17
<b>Heads</b> wearing golden crowns, 9:7 Teeth like <b>lion's</b> teeth, 9:8	<b>Heads</b> like <b>lions</b> , 9:17
<b>Breastplates</b> of iron, 9:9	<b>Breastplates</b> were fiery red and dark blue/red and sulphur-yellow, 9:17
<b>Tails</b> ...like scorpions, to torment people, 9:10	<b>Tails</b> were like snakes...to inflict injury, 9:19 (see syntax) <sup>199</sup>
John hears a large army: sounding like the thundering of many horses and chariots rushing into battle, 9:9	John hears their number: two hundred million, 9:16

**Table 1 Connections between the first and the second woes**

If the first and second woes target the same city (11:13-14), the reading would then allow for a progressive development from a siege to a head-on battle. This idea is attractive, since the siege-like situation in the first woe appears not to be the end of the story. The following woe escalates into a battle. There is mere torture (with no fatalities) in the first woe (9:5-6), while there are fatalities (a third of the men) in the second (9:18). The close literary connections tie the two woes together as a sequence. The three woes being organized in a series further implies some kind of continuity and progression between them. There is a constant forecasting of the following woe (9:12, 11:14) and a great exclamation (‘Γέγονεν’, 16:17) at the climax of the last woe (seventh bowl).

#### 1.5.2. Connections between the second and third woes

The seventh trumpet (cf. 8:13) introduces the third woe. Its culmination could be at the seventh bowl (16:17ff.), since the seventh bowl is the culmination of the whole series of judgment. This seventh bowl is seen to include two components: judgement against *Babylon* and the *cities of the nations* (16:17). Babylon is destroyed by the beast and its allies (17:16). Jesus (on a white horse) destroys the beasts, the kings of

<sup>199</sup> καὶ ἔχουσιν οὐράς ὁμοίας σκορπίοις... καὶ ἐν ταῖς οὐραῖς αὐτῶν ἡ ἐξουσία αὐτῶν ἀδικῆσαι ... (9:10)

αἱ γὰρ οὐραὶ αὐτῶν ὅμοιαι ὄφει... καὶ ἐν αὐταῖς ἀδικοῦσιν. (9:19)

There is an intentional crafting of the syntax and expression to indicate close correlation between the descriptions.

the earth and their armies (19:11-21), and fire from heaven destroys Satan and the nations (20:7-10). There are reasons to suspect that these are different portrayals of one final battle against the Satanic trio and nations (see §1.3 point (3))

A comparison of the second and third woes yields interesting parallels. Both woes include a judgement on ‘the great city’ (ἡ πόλις ἡ μεγάλη), connoting both Jerusalem (11:8) and Babylon (16:19). Both woes consist of earthquakes of different magnitudes (11:13, cf. 16:18). There is also a context of war in both woes. This is explicitly stated for the second woe (9:14-19, troops involved). Babylon being a city in one of its aspects would mean that the beast and the ten horns (its allies) destroyed her in a war (cf. 17:16). As mentioned, in addition to the war on Babylon, a massive battle involving the kings of the whole world would form the second component of the seventh bowl. In the war of the second woe and the massive war in the third woe, troops come either from or beyond the Euphrates (9:14; and the forecast in 16:12). In the semi-insert 10:1-11:13 related to the second woe, the inhabitants of the earth participate in antagonistic actions against the two witnesses (11:9-10) and refuse them burial, thus exposing their bodies (11:1-14), while in third woe, the bodies of those who fight against God’s people are left exposed and become carrion for scavengers (19:19, 21). The resurrection of the two witnesses in 11:11 parallels the resurrection of the martyrs in 20:4-6. The ‘beast from the sea-abyss’ also operates in relation to both the second and third woes. It kills the two witnesses in the great city in 11:7 and destroys the great city Babylon in the third woe 17:16. There appears to be a deliberate design to indicate a close relationship between the second and third woes.

In sum, it appears that the reader is led to see the first and second woes as a building up to the third (climaxing at the seventh bowl), in which the ultimate destruction happens to Babylon and the cities of the nations, and to the beasts and the dragon. The first and second woes seem to be a siege-cum-battle on the same city. I will suggest that it is modelled after Titus’ defeat of Jerusalem (cf. 11:2, 8). The reader is encouraged to see the destruction of Babylon in the third woe in the light of the judgement enacted on Jerusalem in the second woe (11:2).

## ***2. A Historical Template for the Woes***

Having clarified the structure of Revelation, we now proceed to any historical allusions worked into it. One explicit connection to historical personages of the

Graeco-Roman world is reflected in the hint about eight kings (17:8-11). Many have tried to match the kings with Roman emperors of the first century, and different propositions have been offered.<sup>200</sup> I will start not from this premise which does not give a sure footing, but from the details of the first and second woes and the Jewish war of 60-73 C.E.

## 2.1. The Jewish war as template for the first two woes

It is established that the first woe appears to be a siege. Coincidentally, the imperial army's tactics used in a siege correlate in name with details provided in the description of the first woe. In Roman warfare, an 'initial attack by the artillery was launched'...with machines called *tormenta* (cf. Tac. *Hist.* 3.23.4; 84.2, see 33.4) that 'launched javelins and arrows, some of them incendiary, or rocks and beams'.<sup>201</sup> These included ballistic engines of different kinds, hurling arrows and stones. A catapult was called a 'scorpion' and an 'onager' was a smaller 'scorpion'. There were also the *carroballista*, which were mounted on wheels.<sup>202</sup> In the description of the first woe, the sting of *scorpions* tormented the people for five months (8:5, 10). The scorpions were akin to armoured horses prepared for battle (8:7-9). Horses in a Roman cavalry were protected by bardings (coats worn by horses)<sup>203</sup> and chamfrons (protective head covers).<sup>204</sup> This may account partly for the description of the iron breastplates of the horses, with the possibility of the riders' helmet and metal body armour<sup>205</sup> being merged with the protective covers of the horses in the description. The crowns could be those of the riders who could be allied kings joining the war.

During the first Jewish revolt, there were two prominent sieges recounted by Josephus.<sup>206</sup> The *first* was by the forces of Cestius Gallus, the legate of Syria, in 66

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<sup>200</sup> See Beale, 870-75; Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, lxi-lxiii.

<sup>201</sup> Yann Le Bohec, *The Imperial Roman Army* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1994), 138.

<sup>202</sup> Bohec, 138-9.

<sup>203</sup> Karen R. Dixon and Pat Southern, *The Roman Cavalry: From the First to the Third Century AD* (B.T. Batsford, 1992), 61-2.

<sup>204</sup> Dixon, 66-7.

<sup>205</sup> For attire of Roman soldiers, see Dixon, 34-43.

<sup>206</sup> If there was any siege led by Vespasian against Jerusalem, it was interrupted by news of the rapid changes of emperors in 68-69 C.E. and by his own accession in July 69. During this time, there was not much offensive attack on the city. As least, Josephus provides no details of it. Rather, Vespasian stages a brief campaign in Judaea and surrounding areas and not on Jerusalem herself (Joseph. *B.J.*



C.E. to suppress the Jewish revolt that had just started. Cestius marched legion XII Fulminata to Judaea with supporting troops drawn from other Roman legions and reinforced by armies of the client and allied kings, Agrippa II of Judaea, Antiochus IV of Commagene and Soaemus of Emessa (see Joseph. *B.J.* 2.489-508).<sup>207</sup> Margaret Barker notes that these forces came ‘from the north, not far from the upper reaches of the Euphrates’.<sup>208</sup> He besieged Jerusalem for one whole summer,<sup>209</sup> but this attack ended in a humiliating defeat for his forces. The *second* was a five-month siege of Jerusalem conducted by general Titus, and resulted in the fall of Jerusalem in 70 C.E.<sup>210</sup> The length of the siege coheres with the ‘five months’ of torture in the first woe (9:5). There were four legions leading this attack: XV Apollinaris, XII Fulminata, X Fretensis and V Macedonia (Joseph. *B.J.* 5.40-49).<sup>211</sup> 2000 men were drawn from units in Alexandria and 3000 from the Euphrates to supplement the forces of these legions. Besides these, allied kings of Commagene and Emesa and their armies joined in the Roman forces to attack Jerusalem.<sup>212</sup> The emphasis on ‘the great river Euphrates’ in Rev 9:14 could refer to the involvement of the kings of Commagene and Emesa in the war. These two kingdoms were in northern Syria.<sup>213</sup>

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4.491-502, 550-55). See also the chronological table in Jonathan J. Price, *Jerusalem under Siege: The Collapse of the Jewish State 66-70 C.E.* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992), 220.

<sup>207</sup> Josephus, *The Jewish War* (trans. G.A. Williamson; rev. E. Mary Smallwood; Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1981), 173; also Barker, 177. The total force is estimated more than 30 000 men. E. Mary Smallwood, *The Jews under Roman Rule: From Pompey to Diocletian* (SJLA; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1976), 296.

<sup>208</sup> Barker, 177-78.

<sup>209</sup> Thomas Whittemore, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John, the Divine* (Boston: James M. Usher, 1858), 171, 73. Whittemore understands that this siege lasted five months, reading five months as the duration of summer. As summer is about three months, so I think this is a rather forced deduction.

<sup>210</sup> Brian W. Jones, *The Emperor Titus* (London: Croom Helm, 1984), 55. The siege began in late April 70 and ended sometime in September with the entire city in flames. Cf. *B.J.* 6.323-413; Charles L. Murison, *Rebellion and Reconstruction: Galba to Domitian: A Historical Commentary on Cassius Dio's Roman History, Books 64-67 (A.D. 68-96)* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999), 133, 39. For treatment of the Roman siege of Jerusalem, see Rupert Furneaux, *The Roman Siege of Jerusalem* (London: Granada, 1973).

<sup>211</sup> J. Price, 127.

<sup>212</sup> Barker, 271, citing 2.499-501 and 5.39-44. Cf. Joseph. *B.J.* 3.1-9. According to Murison,

Titus' army consisted of four legions along with vexillations from two others, and twenty auxiliary cohorts and eight *alae* of Calvary, plus contingents furnished by client kings, along with Arab levies—a total of perhaps 65,000 men.

Murison, *Rebellion and Reconstruction*, 133. Smallwood estimates the total force to be 60 000 men. Smallwood, 306. For the troops gathered, see also Smallwood, 316-18.

<sup>213</sup> Barker, 271.

Commagene was on the Euphrates, while Emesa was near the Euphrates. The detail in the verse about armies from the Euphrates may also refer to the four Roman legions XV, XII, X and V. After the Parthian war in the sixties,<sup>214</sup> they were stationed in Syria, a province crossed in the East by the Euphrates.<sup>215</sup> From there, legions V and X were sent to help protect Moesia in the West from incursions, and were about to be sent back to Syria when the Jewish War broke out in Judaea in 66 C.E. Since Josephus mentions that Vespasian had gone to Syria to gather Roman forces and support from allied kings, it is likely that legions V and X had returned to Syria after their service in Moesia (Joseph. *B.J.* 3.1-9). Legion XV, on the other hand, had landed in Alexandria, from where Titus fetched it to attack Jerusalem (Joseph. *B.J.* 3.1-9).<sup>216</sup> Smallwood explains that Legion XV was normally stationed at Pannonia, but it was temporarily in Alexandria after fighting the Parthians in a recent campaign.<sup>217</sup> This battle with the Parthians adds to the possibility that it had been stationed near the Euphrates for some time. Legion VII was regularly based in Syria.<sup>218</sup> Before the Jewish War, legion XII had its headquarters in Raphanea (Tac. *Ann.* 2.79; 2.57; Joseph. *B.J.* 7.18) in Syria, near the frontier borders of Euphrates.<sup>219</sup> As a whole, there are quite strong indications of the four legions and forces of allies being in areas bordering the Euphrates before the attack led by Titus on Jerusalem in 70 C.E. One is reminded of the four killing angels released from Euphrates in Rev 9:14-15. The siege on Jerusalem commanded by Titus was instrumental to the fall of Jerusalem.

The five-month siege of the first woe (9:1-11), which I read as a preliminary attack leading up to the second woe, could then either be the siege commanded by Cestius in 66 C.E., or more likely that by Titus in 70 C.E. The siege by Cestius took a summer, about three months, whereas that by Titus took close to five months. The siege by Titus was much more tormenting than the failed attempt by Cestius.

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<sup>214</sup> E. G. Hardy, 'The Movements of the Roman Legions from Augustus to Severus', *English Historical Review* 2 (1887): 625-656, see 634, 36.

<sup>215</sup> See also Barker's connection of these places with the Euphrates. Barker, 177-78.

<sup>216</sup> Hardy, 536.

<sup>217</sup> Josephus, *The Jewish War* (trans. G.A. Williamson), 438, n. 5.

<sup>218</sup> Hardy, 635. It is one of the four permanent Syrian garrisons. Josephus, *The Jewish War* (trans. G.A. Williamson), 435, n. 28.

<sup>219</sup> R. Knox M'Elderry, 'The Legions of the Euphrates Frontier', *CQ* 3 (1909): 44-53, see 49.

Besides, the name of the ‘king’ (βασιλεύς) over the army—the ‘angel of the abyss’ (ὁ ἄγγελος τῆς ἀβύσσου) is Apollyon (9:11), which resonates with the name of legion XV Apollinaris that Titus had fetched personally from Alexandra.<sup>220</sup> The failed attempt by Cestius had led Nero to send Vespasian to suppress the revolt (Josep. *B.J.* 3.3-8). Barker writes, ‘Vespasian entered Galilee with his armies in the Spring of 67 CE (War 3.29-34) and Jerusalem fell forty-two months later, in September 70 CE.’<sup>221</sup> This 42-month / 3 ½-year of historical period coincides incidentally with the 42-month reign of the ‘beast from the sea-abyss’ (13:5-7), which is also the period of the three woes, as deduced. Historically, the siege cum attack by Titus sums up the 42-month period of the war. But Revelation is not a literal depiction of events and involves much creative shaping. The author impressionistically used details of the Jewish war for his depiction: the five-month siege by Titus as the first woe, and the 3 ½-year period of the war for the period of the three woes altogether. The effect is to use the war as a backdrop to the depiction for the three woes. One finds a match with this suggestion in the detail of ‘holy city’ (ἡ πόλις ἡ ἁγία)<sup>222</sup> being trampled (πατέω) by the gentiles in Rev 11:2. The ‘holy city’ there refers unmistakably to Jerusalem. We find a similar description of the war in Luke 21:24: ‘Jerusalem’ is ‘trampled on (πατέω) by the gentiles’. Furthermore, Jerusalem is alluded to in Rev 11:8. There is some creativity in the depiction using elements of the war. The forces unleashed from the Euphrates (9:14-16) in the vision were much larger and more terrifying than that led by Titus and his allies. The number two hundred million could stand for an immense cavalry force gathered against the city.

One further notes that the great city is mapped on to a number of other referents. Besides referring to the ‘holy city’ where Jesus was crucified (11:8), the great city refers figuratively to Egypt, Sodom (11:8), and ultimately to Babylon

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<sup>220</sup> Charles L. Murison, ‘M. Cocceius Nerva and the Flavians’, *TAPA* 133 (2003): 147-57, see 149, n. 8. He states, ‘...Titus was going from Italy to Judaea as legate of the legion XV Apollinaris.’ (Suet. *Vesp.* 4.6; Josep. *B.J.* 3.8). Jones states that M. Tittius Frugi was the legate of XV instead. Jones, *The Emperor Titus*, 50. But Titus, overall in command of the war, could have been seen as in charge over all the forces.

<sup>221</sup> Barker, 186. The Babylonian Talmud gives a rounded figure of three years for the besiegement by Vespasian (b. *Gittin* 56a). The 3 ½ -year (42-month) period is also symbolic of half a full period of seven years.

<sup>222</sup> One of the Jewish coins of the revolt has ‘Jerusalem the Holy’ in Hebrew cast in it. See Marshall, 120-21.

(16:19). We thus believe that the narrative is cleverly reworking Rome's past destruction of the 'holy city' Jerusalem into a series of woes culminating in the destruction of Rome herself — Rome being one of its referents of Babylon.<sup>223</sup> The rhetoric of this dramatic design is ironic: the conqueror will be repaid with the harm done to her victim, and many times more than that (cf. 18:6).

## 2.2. Titus as the beast from the abyss-sea

Taking the idea of a historical template of the Jewish war behind the first and second woes further, we see possible identities of the angel-king over the army from the abyss (9:11) in Nero, Vespasian or Titus. These three were involved in curbing the Jewish revolt at different times. From 66-68 C.E.,<sup>224</sup> Nero, the ruling emperor, had given Vespasian orders to curb the Jewish revolt (Joseph. *B.J.* 3.1-9). But by the end of 69 C.E., Vespasian had assumed the imperial throne,<sup>225</sup> and he sent Titus to finish the war against Jerusalem.<sup>226</sup>

Now, we keep the popular view that in its 'first life', the beast is Nero.<sup>227</sup> There was a popular idea in the East that Nero did not die in his suicide attempt, but had escaped to the Parthians in the East and would one day return to lead the Parthian army against Rome.<sup>228</sup> This spurred imposters of Nero to lead intermittent revolts against Rome.<sup>229</sup> The idea of Nero *redivivus* may have been parodied in the 'beast which...was, now is not, and will come out of the abyss' (τὸ θηρίον ὃ... ἦν καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν καὶ μέλλει ἀναβαίνειν ἐκ τῆς ἀβύσσου; 17:8).<sup>230</sup> As argued, the siege-cum-attack commanded by Titus was featured in the first and second woe. He is then the angel-king in 9:11. Given that the eighth king is the beast 'who was, and

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<sup>223</sup> Babylon is a polyvalent image and it will be shown that she takes on other references or connotations.

<sup>224</sup> Nero reigned up to 9 June 68 C.E. J. Price, 220

<sup>225</sup> J. Price, 221.

<sup>226</sup> J. Price, 221.

<sup>227</sup> The number of his name is 666 (cf. 13:18). See discussion in Osborne, 520.

<sup>228</sup> E.g., *Sib. Or.* 4.155-185. Kraybill, 161.

<sup>229</sup> Tac. *Hist.* 2.8.9; Cass. Dio, 64.9; Suet. *Ner.* 57; cf. Kraybill, 161. See also, John Bishop, *Nero: The Man and the Legend* (London: Robert Hale, 1964), 167-70.

<sup>230</sup> Nero's name transliterated into Hebrew (נֶרֹן קֶסֶר) adds up to 666. Bauckham attests that this 'solution to the riddle 666...has been most widely accepted since it was first suggested in 1831'. See Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 387. For details of the 666 gematria see pp. 384-90. For Nero *redivivus*, see Bishop, 167-75.

now is not' (17:11) and 'will come out of the abyss' (17:8), this eighth king is then Titus. Inductively from the text, Titus is, then, the 'revived' beast/Nero.

We may pause here for a while to question Titus' eligibility to be called a 'king' during his involvement in the Jewish war, though he was then not yet an emperor. The title 'king' in 11:9 may well have meant a general of an army or an emperor. We know of the high position of Titus from the beginning of 70 C.E. when he became a consul.

Vespasian *was* the emperor: he was *Augustus*, he was *pontifex maximus*, he was *pater patriae* and no one else had these titles while he lived. However, Titus possessed *imperium*, presumably from the time when he became consul at the beginning of 70, and after his return to Italy he shared every imperial salutation with Vespasian; from 1 July 70 his years of *tribunicia potestas* were counted off; from 70 he shared every consulship (always ordinary) that his father had, he was censor with his father in 73-74, and as *tutor imperii* he became Praetorian prefect (...see Suet. *Tit.* 6), and as such was really head of the state security service. In addition, in the Acts of the Arval Brethren during Vespasian's principate from 70-79, whenever offerings and prayers are made for Vespasian's safety, Titus' name is added as well (cf. *AFA* [*Acta Fratrum Arvalium*] for 3 January 75, 77, and 78).<sup>231</sup>

Titus did not wait until his accession in 79 C.E. to start ruling. There are views that Titus 'ruled jointly' with Vespasian after he had received tribunician power in 71 C.E., even before his accession.<sup>232</sup> He was allowed to perform some imperial tasks on behalf of his father.

From that time on he never ceased to act as the emperor's partner and even as his protector. He took part in his father's triumph and was censor with him. He was also his colleague in the tribunicial power and in seven consulships. He took upon himself the discharge of almost all duties, personally dictated letters and wrote edicts in his father's name, and even read his speeches in the senate in lieu of a quaestor.

Neque ex eo destitit participem atque etiam tutorem imperii agere. Triumphavit cum patre censuramque gessit una, eidem college et in tribunicia potestate et in septem consulatibus fuit; receptaque ad se prope omnium officiorum cura, cum patris nomine et epistulas ipse

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<sup>231</sup> Murison, *Rebellion and Reconstruction*, 159; also Suet. *Tit.* 6.1-2.

<sup>232</sup> John C. Rolfe, 'Notes on Suetonius', *TAPhA* 45 (1914), 35-47, see 43. Also, John A. Cook, 'Titus and Berenice', *AJP* 72 (1951): 162-175, see 164.

dictaret et edicta conscriberet orationesque in senatu recitaret etiam quaestoris vice...<sup>233</sup>

Titus was, in fact, during that time openly declared by the people that he would be ‘another Nero’ (*alium Neronem*) in an often overlooked historical source (Suet., *Tit.* 7.1).<sup>234</sup> This was due to his cruelty, revelry, riotous living and greed after his rise to power, as well as his illicit relationship with Berenice,<sup>235</sup> the sister of Agrippa II (Suet., *Tit.* 7.2). This appears to be a common impression of him as he ruled akin to a co-emperor with Vespasian. Even though at the time of the Jerusalem siege, Titus had not yet acquired the status of emperor, yet the title ‘king’ in 9:11, besides possibly referring to his power of *imperium* and consulship, can also be understood proleptically to his imminent rise to co-emperorship in practice after his successful Jerusalem campaign. The Romans acclaimed Titus as *imperator* the day the temple was sacked (Joseph. *B.J.* 6. 316; Suet., *Tit.* 5.2).<sup>236</sup> Titus’ successful engagement in the Jerusalem siege (first woe) and battle proper (second woe) marks the beginning of his imminent ‘rise’ to imperial power. The ‘μέλλει’ concerning the beast’s rise from the abyss in Rev 17:8a (καὶ μέλλει ἀναβαίνειν ἐκ τῆς ἀβύσσου) can stress the inceptive quality of his rise to power.<sup>237</sup> In 9:2-11, the angel-king’s release ‘from the abyss’ with his army (9:2, 11) constitutes his rise to power. In a similar way, Titus’ successful siege and attack of Jerusalem paves his way to the great political power, and eventually he becomes the emperor.

In Revelation’s description, the ‘beast from the abyss-sea’ utters proud words and blasphemes God and heaven (13:5-6). Babylonian Talmud *Giṭṭin* 56b portrays a wicked Titus blaspheming heaven. While the beast in its ‘first life’ is seen to have carried a harlot on it (17:3, 8), the Talmud describes Titus (the beast-*redivivus*) taking a harlot by hand and committing a sin (sexual) in the temple (*Giṭṭin* 56b). The reference to the fame of the beast’s success in war (13:4) and, specifically, its

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<sup>233</sup> Suet. *Tit.* 6.1 (Rolfe, LCL).

<sup>234</sup> Commentators commonly point to Domitian as the revived Nero (cf. Juv. 4.38 on Domitian as a bald-headed Nero; Mart. *Epigrams* 11.33 on Nero’s death). Beale, 18 and n. 96. But in the schema of Revelation, I show that Titus fits better as the returned beast from the abyss-sea.

<sup>235</sup> See also J. F. Gilliam, ‘Titus in Julian’s Caesares’, *AJP* 88 (1967): 203-8, see 203.

<sup>236</sup> Jones, *The Emperor Titus*, 53.

<sup>237</sup> Note that the description of ‘the eighth’ (αὐτὸς ὄγδοός ἐστιν) in a line of seven heads in 17:9-11 is slightly different from the seven before him. He is not depicted as an integral part of the seven heads (=kings) and is not named a ‘head’ (king), but yet is seen to be out of the seven (kings). Titus, when he appeared as the ‘beast from the sea-abyss’, was not yet an emperor.

success in war against the saints (literally, ‘the holy ones’, τῶν ἁγίων, 13:7) could allude to Titus’ attack on the Jerusalem, the ‘holy city’ (ἡ πόλις ἡ ἁγία, cf. 11:2). There could be a pun here. Οἱ ἅγιοι (the saints) may possibly be used to allude to the inhabitants of the holy city (i.e., Jerusalem), but they actually refer to the followers of Jesus (14:12; 17:6). This is in line with a juxtaposing of a new and old Jerusalem in Revelation. The author uses historical elements as pigments on his palette creatively.

### 2.3. The ‘now’ in Rev 17:8 and dating of the visions

Once John has seen the vision of the beast carrying a harlot, the angel explains, ‘The beast which you saw, once was, now is not, and is about to (μέλλει) come out of the Abyss ...’ (17:8). Thus, John is in fact shown a past event in the beast carrying a harlot. The beast in its first life (Nero) was no longer around at that point in time. The ‘μέλλει’ in 17:8 can give the meaning of ‘something about to happen’.<sup>238</sup> The imminent rise of the beast from the abyss (in its afterlife), was taken above to refer to Titus’ imminent rise to power as joint ruler with Vespasian after his success in the Jewish war in 70 C.E. At least in terms of the *story time* (i.e., in the ‘now’ of Revelation’s drama<sup>239</sup>), we can deduce that John sees the vision of the beast carrying a harlot at the point of time before Titus’ rise to prominence and after the death of Nero. We are further told that of the seven kings,

10 οἱ πέντε ἔπεσαν, ὁ εἷς ἔστιν, ὁ ἄλλος οὐπω ἦλθεν, καὶ ὅταν ἔλθῃ ὀλίγον αὐτὸν δεῖ μέναι. 11 καὶ τὸ θηρίον ὃ ἦν καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν, καὶ αὐτὸς ὄγδοός ἐστιν καὶ ἐκ τῶν ἑπτὰ ἐστιν, καὶ εἰς ἀπόλειαν ὑπάγει.

Before the imminent rise of the eighth king (deduced as Titus, see §2.2) there is one king on the throne and another about to come, who *must* (δεῖ) reign for a while. So between the present emperor and Titus, there is at least one more accession to take place. Looking at the emperors in succession—Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula,

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<sup>238</sup> Beale, 865.

<sup>239</sup> Imagine a scene at the movies when one in the audience is drawn magically into the screen to become an actor/actress in the show. S/he is transported from real time into ‘story time’ at that moment. John’s transport into heaven (4:1) to view and to participate in some scenes in the visions and he becomes a character in the visionary narrative to the readers. For example, the passive viewer John becomes an active participant without any transition in 11:1. He interacts throughout the visions with the characters in the visions with no problem as if he is in the act itself (7:13-14; 17:1, 7; 21:9-10; 22:1).

Claudius, Nero, a quick change of three emperors (Galba, Otho and Vitellius), then Vespasian and Titus—we can identify the one to come before Titus as Vespasian. He has not come, but when he does ‘it is necessary for him to remain for a while’ (ὀλίγον αὐτὸν δεῖ μείναι, 17:11). Some have read this phrase as signaling a short reign.<sup>240</sup> But could this not be instead a euphemistic way of indicating a long reign for a hated one who was involved in the defeat of Jerusalem? The δεῖ could signal an unwelcome scenario (a reign for quite some time, euphemistically put: ‘a little while’) that nonetheless ‘must’ happen and has to be endured. Vespasian ruled about eleven years,<sup>241</sup> which is not a short time. The one who is reigning is then one of the three short-lived emperors (Galba, Otho or Vitellius) between 9 June 68 and *ca.* 21 December 69 C.E.<sup>242</sup> Nero, the ‘first life’ of the beast, is no longer around at that time. This fits the remark that the beast was not present when John saw the particular vision (17:18).

So one of the visions is *depicted* as being viewed by John in 68/69 C.E. How much certainty does that piece of information allow us to date the composition of Revelation? Actually, not much. Many uncertainties remain. *Firstly*, we do not know if all the visions were shown at the same time as that particular vision. Though the visions in Revelation are generally narrated in close succession using the paratactic ‘καὶ’, there are a few seams in the book that could have allowed the possibility of John viewing (and perhaps recording) the visions in chunks instead of all at one go: major seams are indicated by ‘μετὰ ταῦτα’ (4:1; 7:9; 15:5; 18:1) followed by ‘εἶδον’, with an instance of ‘μετὰ ταῦτα’ and ἤκουσα (19:1). John first hears Jesus’ instruction to write to the seven churches on the Lord’s Day (1:10), but that need not necessarily mean that John received the whole revelation in that single day.

*Secondly* and more importantly, John was not a passive receiver of vision. He participates in the dramatic act and interacts with the characters in the visions (11:1-2; 17:3, 7). If John gets into the act of the visionary drama, would not this participation within the visions reflect ‘story time’ rather than necessarily historical time? The ‘present’ of a drama is the ‘now’ in story time and not historical time. A drama is to various degrees an enactment of reality with its own time frame.

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<sup>240</sup> See Osborne, 619.

<sup>241</sup> Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, lxi.

<sup>242</sup> See Marshall, 111, n. 28 for chronology. It is likely that due to the short reigns of the three emperors, not all three were reflected in Rev 17:11.



*Thirdly*, we do not know if the whole book was completed immediately after the visions were seen. John was suffering when he received the vision. He describes himself as a ‘companion in the suffering’ and ‘patient endurance’ in relation to the Christian faith (Rev 1:1). Being away from home in a foreign place, he might not have the benefit of scribes to help him with such a long composition as much as he could have back home. He could have written down in a draft what he saw in the visions and later, when conditions availed, worked out the whole composition. Eusebius, based on an ancient tradition, writes that John was in exile for his testimony of Jesus during Domitian’s reign and had returned after Domitian’s death (*Hist. Eccl.* 3.18.1; 3.20.11).<sup>243</sup>

Would then the textual clue that John saw the vision of a harlot-on-beast (17:10) sometime in 68/69 C.E. (if taking the ‘now’ in 17:10 as historical time) contradict the external evidence for a 95/96 date of John seeing the visions? (For external evidence, see ch.1, §3.1.) A contradiction is not necessarily seen for any of the first two reasons discussed above. Most of all, I tend to see ‘story time’ instead of historical time being reflected in the present of 17:8. Less important for our purpose, this literary ‘now’ provides a temporal perspective for the author to recast/reshape past events (the Jewish war and the crisis during Domitian’s time; see ch. 4) as future moments of crisis literarily. The re-applicability of historical lessons may be reflected here.<sup>244</sup>

### **3. Conclusion**

In this chapter, I started off from the ‘first principle’, an analysis of the text, and found a historical connection with the world outside the text. Particular correspondences with historical events and persons act as the starting point for further interpretation of socio-historical contexts in the rest of Part One. The vision narrative (chs. 4-22) is seen to make up of the seal, trumpet and bowl sequences (4:1-7:17; 8:1-11:19 and 15:5-19:10). The seal and trumpet-bowl sequences both reach the endpoint in narrative time. There are two sections of visionary units not organized temporally: a major insert section (12:1-15:4) and a final section (19:11-

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<sup>243</sup> Some commentators questioned whether the information about John’s exile was developed based on Rev 1:9-10. Yarbrow Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 55.

<sup>244</sup> Even so, the ultimate judgement of Jesus/God and the new heaven and earth lies in the realm of prediction even if the visions were seen during Domitian’s time.

22:21). An intratextual reading of the first and second woes (chs. 9-11) of the trumpet sequence with a part (chs. 12-13) of the major insert section proves illuminating. There are correspondences between the dragon's introduction of the 'beast from the sea-abyss' (12:18-13:1) and a fallen star's induction of an army from the abyss with their king (9:2-3, 11). The correspondences allow one to identify the 'angel of the abyss' as the 'beast from the abyss-sea' (13: 1; 17:8). This character rises to power at the beginning of the first woe and reigns throughout a 3 ½-year literary period covering the three woes.

In historical terms, the first and second woes allude to the siege-cum-battle against Jerusalem conducted by Titus in the first Jewish revolt.<sup>245</sup> Titus' success in the war on Jerusalem is significant to his rise to great political power. Titus is thus identified as the 'angel/beast from the abyss' and the eighth king in 17:11. Titus as the 'beast from the sea-abyss' is significant for the next chapter.

Following the emergence of a Flavian emperor in the role of a major antagonist, the beast from the sea-abyss, the next chapter (Chapter Three) reads the 'Satanic trio' (the dragon and the two beasts; chs. 12-13) and their cult as modeled in general terms after the three members of the Flavian dynasty and its cult. Both the Flavian cult and the beast-worship in Rev 13, as well as a real situation of crisis during end-Domitianic times that I will show in the chapter after the next (Chapter Four), act as broad contexts to further situate the issue of the author's polemic against the so-called 'Jews' in the last chapter of this part (Chapter Five).

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<sup>245</sup> In *Parables of War*, Marshall argues for the prevalent context of the Judean War (67-74 C.E.) behind the book of Revelation, but he misses out on possible allusions to the siege and war on Jerusalem in the first and second woes.

## **PART TWO—ON THE POLEMIC AGAINST THE SO-CALLED JEWS**

*Part Two suggests in its final chapter, Chapter Five, the underlying issue to the polemical delivery against the so-called 'Jews'. It draws upon the social-historical contexts arrived at in Chapter Three and Four of this part for a fuller understanding of the issue at hand. These two chapters develop upon the historical handhold/anchorage of Titus (a future Flavian emperor) as an important character of the beast from the sea-abyss attained in Chapter Two.*

*In Chapter Three, we see the prominence of the Flavian dynasty and its cult in Asia Minor from 90 C.E. In Chapter Four, Christian vulnerability to false accusations and a judaizing trend that has been present for some time involving Christians, among others, are brought to light in the situation of rampant accusations late in Domitian's time (95/96 C.E.). Domitian's rigorous exaction of the Jewish tax also contributed to the crisis facing Jews, which implicated Christian judaizers. It is proposed finally in Chapter Five that the author of Revelation is concerned with Christians affiliating with the synagogue under the social pressure of the imperial cult in Asia. Their vulnerability with regard to false accusations, the judaizing tendency involving many Christians, the pressure from the imperial cult, and a textual representation in Revelation of a prohibition against judaizing behaviour (in the mark of the beast as a parody of judaizing behaviour) all contribute to this proposition.*

## Chapter Three: Historical Connections to Flavian Emperors and their Cult

Chapter Two teased out the structure in Revelation and posited that the first and second woes allude to the siege and attack on Jerusalem commanded by the Roman general Titus in 70 C.E. In this way, a connection was made between the literary portrayal in the first and second woes (the fifth and sixth trumpets) and the historical setting underlying them. It was also demonstrated that Titus is the beast from the abyss-sea, which leads one to consider, in this chapter, the Flavian emperors as characters behind the Satanic trio, and the Flavian cult in Asia as a possible background to the beast-worship in Rev 13:15. Domitian had promoted the Flavian cult, including the worship of the deified Titus. He fits the role of the ‘beast from the land’ in relation to its promotion of the worship of the ‘beast from the sea’ (13:11-15). The dynastic concept in the three emperors is also strongly promoted. The Satanic trio, as a result, may be seen to parody, to a certain degree, the three emperors of the Flavian dynasty (chs. 12-13).

### 1. Domitian and the Promotion of the Flavian Cult

Historically, it was Domitian who actively promoted the Flavian cult by completing a temple called ‘templum Vespasiani et Titi’ in Capitoline dedicated to the deified Vespasian and deified Titus.<sup>246</sup> Domitian also constructed the Porticus Divorum on Campus Martinus for both Vespasian and Titus.<sup>247</sup> Besides receiving a shrine in the porticus divorum, Titus’ successful Jewish campaign and his deification were commemorated by an arch erected by Domitian in summa Sacra Via.<sup>248</sup> Domitian also built the Templum Gentis Flaviae at his birthplace for the Flavian cult.<sup>249</sup> In addition, the temple to Augustus on the Palatine, being destroyed by fire, was completely rebuilt by Domitian ‘as a memorial to four deified emperors, including Vespasian and Titus’.<sup>250</sup> Despite Cassius Dio and Suetonius portraying an estranged

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<sup>246</sup> L. L. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, 102-3; Brian W. Jones, *The Emperor Domitian* (London: Routledge, 1992), 93. The temple was completed in 87 C.E. Ibid., 88.

<sup>247</sup> Kenneth Scott, *The Imperial Cult under the Flavians* (Stuttgart-Berlin: W. Kohlhammer, 1936), 62-3; Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, 87.

<sup>248</sup> Jones, *The Emperor Domitian* 93. The Domitianic dating is evident on basis of its architectural style.

<sup>249</sup> Scott, *The Imperial Cult*, 64; L. L. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, 103.

<sup>250</sup> Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, 91.

relationship between Domitian and Titus,<sup>251</sup> ‘Domitian seems to have done more for the cult of Titus, than Titus had done for that of Divus Vespasianus’, Kenneth Scott notes.<sup>252</sup> He observes,

Apparently the stories of disrespect [towards Domitian] for the memory of Titus are false or exaggerated, as the evidence of honor for Titus indicates: the official *consecratio* was voted, many municipalities instituted a flamine and at Rome monuments bear witness to Domitian’s activity in honoring his dead brother.<sup>253</sup>

A further instance of Domitian’s promotion of the imperial cult of his brother and father is a provincial temple of the Σεβαστοί at Ephesus in Asia Minor. Friesen argues convincingly that this temple originated fully in the days of Domitian.<sup>254</sup> The temple was dedicated in 89/90 C.E. The office of ‘νεοκόρος’ is first attested in an inscription dedicated to the temple sometime in 90/91 C.E. This supports the idea that the temple began operations in 90 C.E.<sup>255</sup> Friesen suggests that the Flavian emperors, and perhaps Flavian women,<sup>256</sup> were among those worshipped at the temple. However, inscriptional evidence simply indicates that it was a temple of ‘the Σεβαστοί’. Indications are that it was a cult foremost for Titus and Vespasian, the deified Σεβαστοί of the Flavian dynasty. After Domitian suffered *damnatio memoriae*, the temple retained the name of the temple of the Σεβαστοί<sup>257</sup> and continued to operate.<sup>258</sup>

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<sup>251</sup> Cass. Dio, 67.2; Suet. *Dom.* 2.2-3. These sources were often noted as biased against Domitian. See Scott, *The Imperial Cult*, 62. See L. L. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, 99-103, for a more positive treatment of Domitian’s family relations. Whatever personal attitude Domitian had towards Titus, it was beneficial for him to promote Titus’ divinity. Pliny suggests a gain in status to be seen as brother to a god (*Pan.* 11.1). By promoting the Flavian cult, Domitian could win the loyalty of the supporters of Vespasian and Titus, and strengthen his position by strengthening the dynasty. It was considered virtuous to secure divinity for one’s deceased family members. See Scott, *The Imperial Cult*, 68-9.

<sup>252</sup> Scott, *The Imperial Cult*, 102; L. L. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, 102.

<sup>253</sup> Scott, *The Imperial Cult*, 62.

<sup>254</sup> Steven J. Friesen, *Twice Neokoros: Ephesus, Asia and the Cult of the Flavian Imperial Family* (RGRW 116; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1993), 41-9; contra Scott, *The Imperial Cult*, 62.

<sup>255</sup> Friesen, *Twice Neokoros*, 49-50. Friesen notes that the office possibly had to do with the finance or facilities of the temple. *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>256</sup> Domitian, Titus, Vespasian and likely, Domitia. Friesen, *Twice Neokoros*, 49; Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 46.

<sup>257</sup> Friesen, *Twice Neokoros*, 37.

<sup>258</sup> Inscriptions in the temple of the Σεβαστοί in Ephesus dedicated to Domitian were altered to Vespasian. See S. R. F. Price, *Rituals and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 255.

Apparently, the name seemed fit to represent the worshipped deities at the temple and was not altered by the condemnation of Domitian. Furthermore, Domitian, the then ruling emperor, received no divine epithets in the temple's dedications addressed to him.<sup>259</sup> This is surprising, especially, if he were to be one of the recipients of cultic worship at the temple. This is in line with the fact that Domitian's divine titulature of 'master and god' (*dominus et deus*) was 'never a formal title' and was 'never found in inscriptions'. It seems that the epithet was hardly or occasionally used, if ever, by Domitian on himself, though he might have enjoyed being thus called.<sup>260</sup> In dedicatory inscriptions for the imperial temple of Σεβαστοί at Ephesus, "“εὐσεβεία” a term used in relation to deity, is directed in the inscriptions toward the Sebastoi rather than toward Domitian alone'.<sup>261</sup> This, Friesen notes, 'confirms the tendency...of focusing the cult on the Sebastoi rather than on the living emperor'.<sup>262</sup> More certainly, fragments of a colossal statue of the deified Titus in the temple indicate that Titus, evident in the facial resemblance, was one of those receiving worship.<sup>263</sup> The statue was previously thought to be that of Domitian. However, Daltrop *et al* challenges the view, maintaining that the head of the statue is Titus'.<sup>264</sup> The statue's large size, its shape and materials used indicated that it stood against a wall within the cell of the Flavian temple.<sup>265</sup> The colossal nature of the statue is evident from its measurements. Its head measures 1.18 metres high (from chin to crown 0.74 metres) and left forearm was approximately 1.8 m. long from elbow to knuckles.<sup>266</sup> In all, it was 7 metres in height.<sup>267</sup> From the above factors, it

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<sup>259</sup> Friesen, *Twice Neokoros*, 34.

<sup>260</sup> Gradel writes that the title did not originate from Domitian but from 'the emperor's *procurators*, that is, freedmen members of his staff or extended household (*familia*)...always *of* and *to* Domitian, never by himself in the first person'. Ittai Gradel, *Emperor Worship and Roman Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 160. But *Epit. De Caes.* 11.6 describes Domitian demanding himself to be addressed as *dominus* and *deus*. Though there is some notion of Domitian's tendency to exalt himself as God, it is not known that he officially or widely promoted it.

<sup>261</sup> Friesen, *Twice Neokoros*, 40.

<sup>262</sup> Friesen, *Twice Neokoros*, 40.

<sup>263</sup> Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 46, 50, 53.

<sup>264</sup> See Georg Daltrop, Ulrich Hausmann, and Max Wegner, *Die Flavii: Vespasian, Titus, Domitian, Nerva, Julia Titi, Domitilla, Domitia* (Berlin: Mann, 1966), 26, 38, 86, and pl. 15b. Friesen similarly accepts that it is a statue of Titus. Friesen, *Twice Neokoros*, 62; similarly, Giancarlo Biguzzi, 'Ephesus, Its Artemision, Its Temple', *NovT* 40 (1998): 276-90, see 285.

<sup>265</sup> See Biguzzi, 'Ephesus, Its Artemision, Its Temple', 284-85.

<sup>266</sup> Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 50.

<sup>267</sup> Biguzzi, 'Ephesus, Its Artemision, Its Temple', 284.

was possible that *divi* Vespasian and Titus were officially worshipped in this cult but not Domitian, who was not officially deified.

The colossal statue of Titus in the Flavian provincial temple at Ephesus (mentioned above) or a similar one elsewhere might have been like the statue of the beast depicted in Rev 13:14. It was common for elaborate statues in antiquity to have hidden mechanisms to enable them to talk, shoot fire and perform other wonders on order to deceive people (cf. 13:14-15).<sup>268</sup> Though Giancarlo Biguzzi notes that there are no indications that Titus' statue had the usual provisions to speak,<sup>269</sup> it would, nonetheless, not be surprising for a statue of the cult of the ruling dynasty to speak or perform wonders in a spectacular way. The colossal size of the statue, coupled with the strategic location of the temple housing it, in fact, increases the likelihood that it was intended to instill great awe and wonder. Biguzzi notes the hidden persuasion of the Flavian temple in the choice of its site, which is well-connected to the political and commercial centres of the city. With it built on an elevated podium, it was very visible from a large part of the city.<sup>270</sup>

From the above archeological evidence, we see Domitian promoting the cult of the Flavians in various places in the Roman Empire, especially the worship of the deified Flavian predecessors. This ties in with the 'beast from the land' promoting the worship of the 'beast from the sea' (Titus) in Rev 13. Numerous studies, however, equate the 'beast from the sea' that is worshipped with Domitian himself

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<sup>268</sup> For miraculous statues and images, see Steven J. Scherrer, 'Signs and Wonders in the Imperial Cult: A New Look at a Roman Religious Institution in the Light of Rev 13:13-15', *JBL* 103 (1984): 599-610. Lucian describes the trickery of Alexander the false prophet, who had fastened crane windpipes through the head of his serpent to make it speak (Lucian, *Alex.* 26). Other methods and ventriloquism were also possible. Scherrer, 601-3. There were also signs of fire. Hippolytus describes how a sorcerer shot a flaming demon into the air (*Haer.* 4.35). Cassius Dio describes princeps Gaius producing thunder and lightning through the use of devices (59.26-28). Scherrer, 608-9. Fire, thunder and lightning were not only used in cultic and imperial settings. Thunder and lightning were also used on theatre stages. Julius Pollux mentions lightning and thunder making devices (Poll. *Onom.* 4.130).

<sup>269</sup> Biguzzi, 'Ephesus, Its Artemision, Its Temple', 286. Biguzzi explains that there were no provisions seen for the insertion of a crane trachea into the statue's mouth, nor an underground passage in the cell of the temple for the speaker to get close to the statue. This particular statue need not necessarily be the speaking image in Rev 13:15.

<sup>270</sup> The temple is in the vicinity of the administrative ἀγορά, the βουλευτήριον, the πρυτανεῖον, and the temples dedicated to Julius Caesar and goddess Roma. It was also at the intersection of the *Via Sacra* from the Artemision, and a street leading from the political *agora* to the commercial *agora*, near the port. Biguzzi, 'Ephesus, Its Artemision, Its Temple', 287-88.

and posit the imperial priesthood, or some institutions or personnel regulating the imperial cult as the beast from the land.<sup>271</sup> S. Price explains,

The obvious candidate [for the second beast] is the priesthood of the imperial cult, particularly...of the province of Asia. This would add force to the imagery of the beast coming from the land. The second beast is said to compel all to erect and worship the image of the first beast. If one accepts the conventional Domitianic date for Revelation, it is tempting to think that the establishment of the provincial cult of Domitian at Ephesus, with its colossal cult statue, is what lies behind our text [of Revelation]....Indeed I have seen no other interpretation which fits the known geographical and temporal contexts.... It is in principle quite likely that the establishment of the cult of Domitian at Ephesus, which involved the participation of the whole province, as attested by the series of dedications by numerous cities, led to unusually great pressure on the Christians for conformity...<sup>272</sup>

Price's evaluation of the significance of the imperial cult during Domitian's time identifies rightly the imperial cult as a major difficulty of the addressed Christians in Revelation. As noted, however, the colossal statue, of which fragments remain, would be likely Titus' and not Domitian's. While the cult of the Σεβαστοί in Ephesus was overtly that of Vespasian and Titus who were deified, Domitian shared in their honours. Friesen observes that Domitian was addressed not as θεός but Σεβαστός in the dedicatory inscriptions to the temple. He comments that the latter title would still include Domitian in the worship of the temple.<sup>273</sup> If there was any promotion of Domitian's divinity, it was a subtle one. L. A. Thompson comments on the lack of 'evidence contemporary to Domitian to support the post-Domitian claims that he required titles appropriate to a tyrant or that he shifted from principate to

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<sup>271</sup> See suggestions in Steven J. Friesen, 'The Beast from the Land: Revelation 13:11-18 and Social Setting', in David Barr (ed.), 49-64, see 59-63. The many propositions of the 'beast from the land' include the imperial cult's priesthood, Asia's provincial council called the *koinon*, local imperial cult offices, municipal offices, pagan worship in general, false Christian prophets or teachers, wealthy elite in Asia, and even choirs and athletic events, etc. For arguments against the second beast as the imperial priesthood, provincial bureaucracy or elite families of Asia promoting the imperial cult, see Antoninus King Wai Siew, *The War between the Two Beasts and the Two Witnesses: A Chiastic Reading of Revelation 11.1-14.5* (LNTS 283; London: T&T Clark, 2005), 266-72.

<sup>272</sup> S. Price, 197. It may not accurate to describe the imperial cult that Domitian established as the 'cult of Domitian', as Price puts it. Rather, it was more the cult of the Σεβαστοί, his predecessors, Vespasian and Titus. Domitian could have been honoured in relation to the cult, but was probably not worshipped as god.

<sup>273</sup> Friesen, *Twice Neokoros*, 34.



dominante'.<sup>274</sup> The comments that Domitian had required public sacrifices to his statue (Plin. *Pan.* 52.6)<sup>275</sup> and set many statues of himself in gold and silver on the Capitol among state gods (Suet., *Dom.* 13.2)<sup>276</sup> were made by later writers who were biased against him. It is also not clear whether the many statues were meant for worship purposes. Domitian's promotion of self-worship was ambiguous,<sup>277</sup> but his promotion of the Flavian cult was clear.

A significant reason for thinking that the 'beast from the land' is an emperor, such as Domitian, rather than merely an imperial priest, is that the second beast 'exercised *all* the authority (τὴν ἐξουσίαν... πᾶσαν ποιεῖ) of the first beast on his behalf' (Rev 13:12; emphasis mine). This suggests that the second beast (13:12 and 14) has the capacity of an emperor, not anything less than that. The first beast, commonly posited to be an emperor, passes down his *full* authority to the second (13:12). The imperial priesthood (commonly suggested as the second beast) did not wield such economic power to exclude people from the economy (13:16-17), nor had it power over life and death (13:15). An imperial priesthood would not have the full power of an emperor.<sup>278</sup> But it was not uncommon for emperors of imperial Rome to take up the most prestigious priestships.<sup>279</sup> Scott held some 80 years back a position similar to the present thesis that the second beast is Domitian promoting the Flavian cult.<sup>280</sup> Though of course, given Revelation's common polyvalent images, other possible denotations might also have been possible to a certain degree.<sup>281</sup>

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<sup>274</sup> For a concise analysis, see Leonard A. Thompson, 'Domitianus Dominus. A Gloss on Statius *Silvae* 1.6.84', *AJP* 105 (1984): 469-75.

<sup>275</sup> The colossal equestrian statue, *Stat. Silv.* 1.1; Radice, LCL, 441, n. 2.

<sup>276</sup> See Donald McFayden, 'The Occasion of the Domitianic Persecution', *AJT* 24 (1920): 46-66, see 56-7.

<sup>277</sup> There may be instances when flatterers call Domitian 'lord and god', worshipped (προσκυνέω) him, or swore by his genius in Rome, but these acts were of a voluntary nature. See Yarbrow Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 71-2. Also see how Domitian incorporates his image on the headdress of the *Sodales Flaviales* (*Dom* 4.4) below in § 1.2.

<sup>278</sup> Siew (p. 267) expresses the same concern about the limited power of the imperial priesthood.

<sup>279</sup> See record in Stephen J. Simon, 'The Greater Official Priests of Rome under the Flavian-Antonine Emperors (Diss.; Chicago: Loyola University of Chicago, 1973).

<sup>280</sup> See Scott, *The Imperial Cult*, 131.

<sup>281</sup> In ch. 5 § 1.1.

## 2. The Satanic Trio and the Flavian Dynasty

I further suggest that the Satanic trio (the dragon and the two beasts) allude in part to Vespasian and his two sons. The three emperors in the Flavian dynasty befit the number in the Satanic trio. The Flavian emperors in succession were presented as a close-knit dynasty in public image.<sup>282</sup> Emperor Vespasian frequently included his sons in imperial propaganda to prepare for their succession. This is evident in the number of coin types that featured the three together as a dynasty.<sup>283</sup> Authority appears in Revelation to be handed from the dragon to the first beast (13:2) and then the second (13:12, 14). As in Rev 13:12, Domitian did exercise the full authority of Titus and promoted the worship of his statue (13:12b). Domitian assumed full imperial authority after Titus' death. In a sense, the source of origin of their authority is Vespasian (the dragon; cf. 13:11), the first Flavian emperor and the father of the two other emperors. The close-knit nature of the dynasty, at least on the appearance, is also presented in the Flavian cult. Domitian actively promoted its importance in terms of the ideology of his reign. In a bid to counter oppositions to his reign, the cult served to strengthen Domitian's position as an emperor in the legacy of two previous

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<sup>282</sup> The Julio-Claudian had five and the Nervan-Antonian dynasty had seven emperors.

<sup>283</sup> Scott sums it well from the coin types in Mattingly,

The Roman coinage indicates clearly the dynastic plans of Vespasian. The princes of the Flavian house have a share in the right of coinage. In discussing the reverse types of 69-70 Mattingly writes, "Vespasian from the first left no doubt about his intention of founding a dynasty. The busts of his sons, Titus and Domitian, appear facing one another on the reverse, with a legend describing each of them as 'Caesar Augusti Filius' and mentioning the offices assigned to them in 71, the consulship to Titus, the praetorship to Domitian. On other coins each bears the title of 'princeps iuventutis' and are represented characteristically as armed warriors on horseback or as magistrates seated on curule chairs, holding the branch of peace. A rare aureus, perhaps from a foreign mint shows them standing, holding rolls as symbols of public life in Rome, *paterae* as symbols of priesthood. The title of 'princeps iuventutis' had already come to be a normal designation of the heir apparent." [Mattingly, xxxiii] A reverse type of the bronze coinage of the same period shows Tutela, "guardianship," with two children, probably Titus and Domitian, before her. The bronze coinage of 71 stresses the establishment of a new ruling family: one type shows Vespasian on the reverse and his sons on the obverse; another bearing *Concordia Aug.* on the reverse is probably correctly interpreted as an expression of the "harmony in the imperial house." "The Spes Augusta type," according to Mattingly, "shows the goddess, Spes, greeting three helmeted men, who can be none other than Vespasian and his sons; the type is a definite proclamation of the new dynasty, resting not only on the warrior emperor, but on the two full-grown sons, who had both been fighting Rome's battles." Still another type, that of Provident(ia) and an altar has with great probability been taken to suggest "the forethought that provides for the succession."

Scott, *The Imperial Cult*, 23-4. For the imperial propaganda of the dynasty from its inception, see Mary Beard, 'The Triumph of Flavius Josephus', in A. J. Boyle and W. J. Dominik (eds.), *Flavian Rome: Culture, Image, Text* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2003), 543-58, esp., 553-57.

respected Flavian emperors. Domitian endowed divine status on all immediate family members who predeceased him since Vespasian,<sup>284</sup> something not done under the Julians.<sup>285</sup> The propagandistic effect was ‘to teach that descent from Vespasian was a sufficient guaranty of the possession of a divine nature’. In the reign of the Julians, separate priesthoods and shrines were instituted for each *divus* and *diva* consecrated, but Domitian centralized the worship of the Flavian *divi* under the priesthood of the Sodales Flaviales in two locations, Templum divi Vespasiani (et Titi) and Templum Flaviae Gentis.<sup>286</sup> ‘The divinity of the Flavian gens as a whole, rather than that of its individual members’, was projected,<sup>287</sup> in order that Domitian would share in the glory of the deified Flavians. The official headdress, golden crowns, of the Sodales Flaviales had the images of Domitian and Capitoline trinity (*Dom* 4.4). Domitian, through the imperial cult, places himself in an unspoken manner among the gods.<sup>288</sup> Domitian also gained praises for his virtue of promoting the deification of his deceased family members.<sup>289</sup>

I note that the second beast performs his authority ‘before’ the first beast (τὴν ἐξουσίαν τοῦ πρώτου θηρίου πᾶσαν ποιεῖ ἔνώπιον αὐτοῦ), giving the idea that the two beasts actually co-exist at the narrative level. The two beasts (also the dragon/devil) meet their end together in the final battle with Jesus Christ (19:20; 20:10).<sup>290</sup> In terms of the imperial cult, one can understand the deified Titus and Vespasian in heaven in some form of continuing relationship with Domitian on earth.<sup>291</sup> Given the creativeness of the visions in Revelation, one should not press

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<sup>284</sup> McFayden, 52-3.

<sup>285</sup> Domitian is ‘the first emperor who introduces the emperor-cult in Rome by erecting a temple for the house of the Flavii. Not only does he have a divine father (Vespasian) and brother (Titus), but he creates the apotheosis for Julia, Titus’ daughter—his own second wife—and for his son’. Sjef van Tilborg, *Reading John in Ephesus* (Leiden; New York; Köln: 1996), 44.

<sup>286</sup> McFayden, 54-5. For more details of *sodales* of deified Vespasian and/or Titus, see Scott, *The Imperial Cult*, 79.

<sup>287</sup> McFayden, 56.

<sup>288</sup> See McFayden, 55-6. For other ways Domitian places himself indirectly among the gods, see McFayden, 56-7. McFayden notes that the Roman legislation served to put a check on Domitian’s wish to be publicly worshipped in Rome, though he was openly worshipped in the provinces, as were other emperors. McFayden, 56, n. 4. The flattering poets, Statius and Martial, also promoted his divine image. See Tilborg, 45.

<sup>289</sup> Scott, *The Imperial Cult*, 61-75.

<sup>290</sup> See ch. 2, §1.3 for one final battle against the Satanic trio.

<sup>291</sup> Stat. *Silv.* 1.1.94 ff. The coexistence of the deified members in heaven with those on earth are reflected in the lyrics of the court poets.

details in the visionary depiction to confirm to historical points when discrepancies arise. It seems that the author is conflating the separate reigns of the Flavians into a summative period and caricaturing the individual emperors of the dynasty, as well as the dynasty as a whole.

### **3. Conclusion**

The Flavian cult, and imperial cults in general, affected the lives of people in Asia Minor. The temple of the Σεβαστοί in Ephesus had a large sphere of influence in Asia Minor. The temple received dedications from no less than thirteen cities, suggesting its great prominence.<sup>292</sup> It is called ‘Asia’s common temple of the Σεβαστοί in Ephesus’ (from an inscription: ναῶι τῷ ἐν Ἐφέσῳ τῶν Σεβαστῶν κοινῷ τῆς Ἀσί[ας]),<sup>293</sup> suggesting its close relationship to the cities of Asia. Biguzzi suggests that with the construction of this temple, life in the province of Asia, as in the metropolis Ephesus, reorganized itself with the temple as ‘a new centre of cohesion’.<sup>294</sup> Ephesus’s position as the neokorate of the emperor cult is promulgated through its title ‘Ephesians twice neokoros’ (Ἐφεσίων Δὶς Νεοκόρων) for the cults of Artemis and the Emperors.<sup>295</sup> More generally, Biguzzi observes based on surviving records of temples, priests and alters that all seven cities mentioned in Revelation had evidence of imperial cults operating in them at various times.<sup>296</sup> Of the seven, Pergamum, Smyrna and Ephesus had provincial imperial cults by the last decade of the first century.<sup>297</sup> Imperial worship is ‘in fashion’ in Asia Minor towards the end of the first century.

In this chapter we saw that the Flavian dynasty could be a backdrop to the depiction of the Satanic trio. With Flavian cult right at the doorstep of the churches in Asia Minor, the social pressures Christians faced during Domitian’s time could have been reflected in the pressure to worship the beast in Rev 13:11-15. Domitian had promoted the Flavian cult actively through numerous building programs of

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<sup>292</sup> Friesen, *Twice Neokoros*, 42, 46-7.

<sup>293</sup> From a dedicatory statue by Aphrodisias to the temple. Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 44; Friesen, *Twice Neokoros*, 32-33, 35.

<sup>294</sup> Biguzzi, ‘Ephesus, Its Artemision, Its Temple’, 288.

<sup>295</sup> Friesen, *Twice Neokoros*, 56-7.

<sup>296</sup> Biguzzi, ‘Ephesus, Its Artemision, Its Temple’, 280.

<sup>297</sup> Biguzzi, ‘Ephesus, Its Artemision, Its Temple’, 281-89.

temples honouring his Flavian predecessors. One of them, in particular, is the temple of the Σεβαστοί in Ephesus, which began operations in 90 C.E. Certainly, Domitian did not officially enforce imperial worship, nor did he decree punishment for any who avoided the cult, as did the ‘beast from the land’ (13:15). But one can imagine that the imperial cult had a major presence in the society and imperial worship was a central part of social activities, such as those of guilds and voluntary associations. Moreover, Domitian had promoted the Flavian cult as an integral part of his dynastic ideology, and had used it to strengthen his position as emperor. Avoidance of the cult could have been viewed as a subversive behaviour.

We see in the next chapter that public accusers could have conveniently accused Christians who avoided the imperial cult of *maiestas*, ἀθεότης or ἁσέβεια—the typical charges in the widespread accusations towards the end of Domitian’s reign. With regard to these charges, it is surmised that Christians were more vulnerable than Judaistic Jews belonging to synagogues (which were more established than Christian churches) and more vulnerable than pagans who were pluraltheistic and had no scruples with participation in the imperial cult. Many Christians could have been implicated in the rampant accusations during Domitian’s time. The rigorous exaction of the Jewish tax during Domitian’s time further aggravated the pressure faced by Christian Jews and Christian judaizers, wrongly implicated. We now proceed to a study of the crisis Christians would have faced late in Domitianic time.

## Chapter Four: A Situation of Crisis during Domitian's Time

Following the prominence of the Flavian images we see in the past three chapters, I illustrate in this chapter a real situation of crisis that Christians could have faced late in Domitian's time, which enlightens our understanding of the crisis in Rev 13:1-18. In the next chapter, I show that in Rev 13:1-18, the two components of pressure from the beast (that of beast-worship and wearing the beast's mark) provide an important clue to the issue of the polemic against the so-called 'Jews'.

Scholars have for a long time discussed whether Christians faced pressures during Domitian's time.<sup>298</sup> Recent studies see no 'persecution' during Domitian's time. Even so, I posit that the pressure that Christians faced towards the end of Domitian's reign was real. Not that Domitian specifically targeted Christians, but that private accusers exploited Domitian's avarice (Suet., *Dom.* 12.1-2). Furthermore, Domitian had exacted the Jewish tax that his father instituted 'with the utmost rigour' (*acerbissime*),<sup>299</sup> in order to replenish the imperial treasury (Suet., *Dom.* 12.2).<sup>300</sup> His strict exaction of the Jewish tax had caused problems for Christians who lingered at the fringes of the Jewish community.<sup>301</sup> In addition, the centrality of the Flavian cult

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<sup>298</sup> See Steven J. Friesen, 'The Cult of the Roman Emperors in Ephesos: Temple Wardens, City Titles, and the Interpretation of the Revelation of John', in Helmut Koester (ed.), *Ephesos Metropolis of Asia: An Interdisciplinary Approach to its Archaeology, Religion, and Culture* (HTS; Cambridge: Mass.: Harvard Divinity School, 1995), 228-250 for a good survey of major views on this. Others include: Warden, 203-212; S. Price, 197; Yarbrow Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 69-71; G. E. M. de Ste Croix, 'Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted?', *Past and Present* 27 (1964): 6-38; see also response by Sherwin-White and reply by de Ste Croix, 23-27 and 28-38; Johannes Knudsen, 'The Lady and the Emperor: A Study of the Domitian Persecution', *CH* 14 (1945): 17-32; McFayden, 46-66.

Views of whether Domitian persecuted the Christians range from proponents of severe persecution by Domitian (an obsolete view) to peaceful relationships and co-existence with the imperial cult. An example of the latter is L. L. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, 171-4. It is Ste Croix's thesis that public pressure was the source of sporadic imperial action against Christians who refused to worship pagan gods. Yarbrow Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 70; G. E. M. de Ste Croix, 6-38; see also rejoinder and reply, pp. 23-27, 28-38.

<sup>299</sup> See also Paul Keresztes, 'The Jews, the Christians, and Emperor Domitian', *VC* 27 (1973): 1-28, see 3. L. L. *The Book of Revelation*, Thompson, 134.

<sup>300</sup> C. H. V. Sutherland, 'The State of the Imperial Treasury at the Death of Domitian', *JRS* 25 (1935): 150-62, see 157-160. Sutherland argues that the motivation behind Domitian's indiscriminate confiscations was primarily a financial need to keep a balanced financial budget, and only secondarily punitive; contra, Ronald Syme, 'Imperial Finances under Domitian, Nerva and Trajan', *JRS* (1930): 55-70, esp. 67.

<sup>301</sup> Brent maintains rightly that the Jewish tax issue was 'particularly critical' in contributing to the accusations of the Christians by opponents. The problem was aggravated by adverse Jewish-Christian relations. Allen Brent, *The Imperial Cult and the Development of the Church Order: Concept and*

in Domitian's ruling ideology would have rendered it a great 'offence' for those who shunned the imperial cult. Rampant calumny during his last years resulted in Christians, among others, being accused of various charges.<sup>302</sup> There was also a brief decree to kill Jews of Davidic descent. This implicated Christian Jews (*Hist. Eccl.* 3.20.1-2). Moreover, Domitian had been, at times, ruthless in his powers of execution of punishments (Suet., *Dom.* 8.1-4; 10.1-5; 11.1-3; 15.1; Cass. Dio, 67.11.2-3). A woman who undressed before his statue (Cass. Dio, 12.2) and spectators who hissed at his gladiators in games were executed (Plin. *Pan.* 33). Besides the accusations in relation to the Jewish tax, sentences of property confiscation,<sup>303</sup> banishment<sup>304</sup> and death were also a consequence of the rampant accusations of *maiestas* (Suet., *Dom.* 12.1),<sup>305</sup> and ἀθεότης or ἀσεβεία (Cass. Dio, 67.14.2; 68.1.2;<sup>306</sup> see §3.1.5, para 4 of this chapter for definition of the terms).

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*Images of Authority in Paganism and Early Christianity before the Age of Cyprian* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1999), 168, 128-130; cf. 186-87.

<sup>302</sup> Yarbrow Collins sees those involved to be 'at most, sympathizers of Judaism or God-fearers'. Yarbrow Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 69. I will suggest instead that Christians were probably significantly implicated in the matter of the Jewish tax.

<sup>303</sup> Suet. *Dom.* 12.2.

<sup>304</sup> Cass. Dio, 68.1.2-3.

<sup>305</sup> Kyle defines,

*Maiestas* was seen as an extreme category of injury (*iniuria*) to the state; and as the emperor became the state, it grew to encompass insults to the emperor or to magistrates. According to Tacitus (Ann. 1.72.3-4; cf. Suet. Aug. 55) under Augustus and later, *maiestas* could apply to words as well as deeds; refusing to swear by the spirit of a divine emperor or criticism of the state or its officials became dangerous...Adding to the potential for abuse, especially in treason trials of the wealthy, was a system of rewarding accusers (*delatores*). Anyone could bring a charge of treason, even those normally barred (e.g., slaves, women, a freedman against his patron); and if a criminal trial brought a conviction, the accuser was rewarded with one-quarter of the defendant's confiscated property.

Donald G. Kyle, *Spectacles of Death in Ancient* (London: Routledge, 2001), 97-98. In short, this offence refers to 'disloyalty, if not conspiracy and therefore treason, against the ruling emperor'. Robert Malcolm Errington, *Roman Imperial Policy from Julian to Theodosius* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 119. For the common charge of (*laesa*) *maiestas* during Domitian's time, see Scott, *The Imperial Cult*, 129-30.

Schoedel points out that the refusal to honour pagan gods when instructed to (just as in the case similar to Plin. *Ep.* 10.96) might not have been the main reason for the charge of *crimen maiestatis*, but rather the stubbornness to follow instructions by imperial authorities that could lead to the charge of *maiestas*. Such stubbornness is interpreted as being subversive. William R. Schoedel, 'Christian "Atheism" and the Peace of the Roman Empire', *CH* 42 (1973): 309-319, see 311.

<sup>306</sup> Cf. Kereszte, 3.

## 1. The Jewish Tax Issue and Calumnies Affecting Christians

### 1.1. The Jewish tax incidence

Vespasian instituted the Jewish tax after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. as a contribution to the re-building of the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus in Rome.<sup>307</sup> It was another form of the temple tax that Jews before 70 C.E. were footing while the temple in Jerusalem still stood. Vespasian had decreed that the Jewish tax should be collected ‘from every Jew at the rate of 2 *denarii* per annum’ from ‘every Jew, male or female, one year of age (or older)’ in the second year of the Vespasian’s reign (70 C.E.).<sup>308</sup> However, there is evidence only for receipts issued for taxpayers aged three.<sup>309</sup> The Jewish tax, though meant to be a replacement of the temple tax payable by Jewish men above twenty before 70 C.E., was from Vespasian’s time applicable to both men and women, the young and old, slaves and freedmen.<sup>310</sup> The lower limit of one year of age may have been raised to three years of age a few years after the tax was decreed.<sup>311</sup> The upper age limit for the payment of the tax is not attested for males. A man of ninety was checked in court for the mark of circumcision in relation to the tax (Suet., *Dom.* 12.2), indicating no upper age limit for male Jews. Tax receipts of female Jews are evident only up to sixty-two years of age.<sup>312</sup>

Cassius Dio identifies Jews who keep the paternal customs as liable for the Jewish tax (65.7.2). Josephus defines those liable as generically ‘Jews’ (Ἰουδαῖοι). He further compares the payment of the Jewish tax to that of the temple tax (*B.J.* 7.6.6).<sup>313</sup> Suetonius, also simply refers to the Jewish tax as a tax on ‘Jews’ (*Dom.* 12.2). Suetonius’ definition is the least specific. Cassius Dio’s definition, the most

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<sup>307</sup> Michael S. Ginsburg, ‘Fiscus Judaicus’, *JQR*, NS 21 (1931): 284-86; Yarbrow Collins, ‘Insiders and Outsiders’ in the Book of Revelation’ in Jacob Neusner, and Ernest S. Frerichs (eds.), “*To See Ourselves as Others See Us*”: *Christians, Jews, “Others” in Late Antiquity* (Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1985), 187-218, see 196.

<sup>308</sup> Serman LeRoy Wallace, *Taxation in Egypt from Augustus to Diocletian* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1938), 173. See also M. Ginsburg, 287-91.

<sup>309</sup> Margaret H. Williams, ‘Domitian, the Jews and “Judaizers”’, *Historia* 39 (1990): 196-211, 199. Scholars generally believe age three to be the lower limit of tax liability. Cf. *CPJ* 2:114; Wallace, 174; Barbara Levick, *Vespasian* (London: Routledge, 1999), 101; Smallwood, *The Jews*, 373.

<sup>310</sup> *CPJ* 2:114.

<sup>311</sup> Wallace, 174; Williams, 199.

<sup>312</sup> For details, see Smallwood, *The Jews*, 373.

<sup>313</sup> Thackeray, LCL.



specific, implies that there was a distinction made between Jews who kept paternal customs and those who did not, and only the former were liable to pay the Jewish tax. Proselytes (full converts to Judaism), who were considered members of the Jewish community and who participated in Jewish customs, naturally paid the temple tax.<sup>314</sup> It follows then that such proselytes also paid the Jewish tax that was implemented as a continuation of the temple tax after the fall of Jerusalem (*J. W.* 7.6.6).<sup>315</sup> On the other hand, renegade Jews did not pay the temple tax and likewise were exempted from the Jewish tax. The mark of a ‘Jew’, either born or converted, lies in the practice of the religion through observances of Jewish customs. Philo describes the importance of the Jewish law, customs and religious sites to the Jewish nation (*In Flacc.* 7.47-8.57). The identifications of those liable for the Jewish tax by Cassius Dio, Josephus and Suetonius, thus, do not contradict one another. They are simply different ways of referring to the category of Jews who observe paternal customs. To outsiders, the most defining mark of a ‘Jew’ was the practice of Jewish customs, especially circumcision.<sup>316</sup> From the evidence, the Jewish tax was meant to be exacted on Jews who practised Jewish customs, which were part and parcel of Judaism.<sup>317</sup>

Evidence suggests that there was a special fiscal department, *fiscus Judaicus*, managing the collection of the Jewish tax.<sup>318</sup> In ostraka from Apollinopolis, we see special tax collectors called ‘πράκτορες Ἰουδαϊκοῦ τελέσματος’ in charge of the collection of the Jewish tax, evidenced from the time of emperor Titus.<sup>319</sup> Separate receipts were issued for the Jewish tax.<sup>320</sup> Ἀμφοδάρχης of certain Jewish quarters in Arsinoë had a reasonable system for keeping track of those liable for the tax. There was also periodical examination (ἐπίκρισις) of new minors.<sup>321</sup> Given that a reasonable system of tax collection was in place based on evidence in Egypt, it

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<sup>314</sup> Smallwood, *The Jews*, 376.

<sup>315</sup> Leonard A. Thompson, ‘Domitian and the Jewish Tax’, *Historia* 31 (1982): 329-42, see 335.

<sup>316</sup> Circumcision to Jews and gentiles alike were seen as synonymous to the acceptance of Judaism. Cohen, ‘Crossing the Boundary’, 27.

<sup>317</sup> M. Ginsburg, 288.

<sup>318</sup> L. A. Thompson, ‘Domitian and the Jewish Tax’, 329; cf. Wallace, 170f.

<sup>319</sup> *CPJ* 2:115, 124, no. 181. Four instances of exceptions are noted.

<sup>320</sup> *CPJ* 2:115; for exceptions see nos. 183, 202, 203 and 217.

<sup>321</sup> *CPJ* 2:204 and 205-8.

would still be possible that a Jew (or a proselyte to Judaism) who had converted to Christianity would continue to follow Jewish customs, pay the tax and enjoy the cover of Judaism for their faith.

Could Domitian have modified in some way the implementation of the tax between the eighth (88-89 C.E.) and twelfth year (92-93 C.E.) of his reign? Ostraka evidence in Edfu indicates a change in the tax's name from τιμὴ δηναρίων δύο Ἰουδαίων (the price of the two denarius of the Jews) to Ἰουδαϊκὸν τέλοςμα (Jewish tax).<sup>322</sup> Tcherikover and Fuks reason that such a change originated in Rome, since the earlier name was certainly a Greek translation of a Latin term (*denarii duo Judaeorum*) and also because the denar was a Roman coin, not the local currency used to pay the tax in Egypt.<sup>323</sup> It remains to be speculated whether this change in the name of the tax has anything to do with Domitian exacting the Jewish tax rigorously (Suet., *Dom.* 12.2).<sup>324</sup>

Shaye Cohen alerts us to the blurred boundaries between various groups, such as Jews, proselytes, Jews intermarrying with gentiles, god-fearers, judaizers and apostate Jews. Cohen allows irregularities between the Jewish community and municipal government in tax jurisdiction.

There is no reason to assume that all these jurisdictions would necessarily have reached identical conclusions in every case, or to assume that the boundary definition used by the Jewish community of Ephesus would necessarily have been identical with that which was operative in the other organized Jewish communities of Asia Minor, or, for that matter, of Italy, Syria, Egypt, North Africa, Palestine and Babylonia.<sup>325</sup>

Ambiguous identities may also stem from different perspectives on the matter. For instance: a 'proselyte' may be a 'Jew' in the eyes of outsiders (cf. *Acts Pil.* 2.1-4); Christian judaizers may be called 'Jews' by other gentiles. A gentile could enter communion with Jews by observing Jewish laws and living in the manner of Jews (Joseph. *C. Ap.* 2.29). Despite *b. Yeb.* 47b confirming the fact that a proselyte could be totally like a born Israelite, the distinction between Jews and proselytes was evident

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<sup>322</sup> *CPJ* 2:112-13.

<sup>323</sup> *CPJ* 2:112.

<sup>324</sup> See Williams, 198.

<sup>325</sup> Cohen, 'Crossing the Boundary', 13-14.

from names marked with 'proselyte' on epitaphs and synagogue inscriptions.<sup>326</sup>

Generally there could be much confusion by members of the public as to who was a true Jew.

A 'Jew' meant different things to different people. It is possible that Jewish-Christians remained undifferentiated from other Jews in some communities. But if the 'apostate' Jews/ex-proselytes converting to Christianity had aroused the enmity of zealous Jews, they could either be accused of tax evasion or denied the protective privileges of Judaism. Some Jews (or proselytes) turned Christians could have ceased to pay the Jewish tax, given their disassociation from Judaism or from the Jewish community. Christian judaizers (i.e., of gentile origin) would naturally not need to pay the Jewish tax,<sup>327</sup> but they could have been wrongly recognized as 'Jews' and accused of not paying the tax, when in fact they were not required to do so. Their keeping of Jewish customs and not the Jewish faith could have added to the confusion.

## 1.2. Two categories of people denounced for Jewish tax offence

It is clear that rigorous exaction of the Jewish tax, fueled by false accusations, had reached a critical point, so much so that Nerva, the succeeding emperor, needed to put an end to the *calumnia* (wrongful accusations<sup>328</sup> or malicious prosecutions).<sup>329</sup> The seriousness of the matter was reflected in a series of coins minted in 96 C.E. immediately after Nerva's accession.<sup>330</sup> These bore the legend *FISCI JUDAICI CALUMNIA SUBLATA* (The malicious accusation of the treasury for the Jewish tax has been removed).<sup>331</sup> In fact, this legend appeared on the first three issues of coins

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<sup>326</sup> Cohen, 'Crossing the Boundary', 29.

<sup>327</sup> See Cohen, 'Crossing the Boundary', 2.

<sup>328</sup> L. L. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, 134; Rutledge, 42.

<sup>329</sup> De Ste Croix, 15.

<sup>330</sup> For coinage, see E. Mary Smallwood, *Documents Illustrating the Principates of Nerva, Trajan, and Hadrian* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), no. 28; *RIC* 2.227 no. 58; 228 no. 82.

<sup>331</sup> Martin Goodman, 'The *Fiscus Iudaicus* and Gentile Attitudes to Judaism in Flavian Rome', in Jonathan Edmonson et al (eds.), *Flavius Josephus and Flavian Rome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 167-177, see 168-89. Thompson translates, 'The misadministration of the Jewish imperial treasury is abolished'. L. L. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, 134. Another translation: 'Relief from the abuses of the Jewish tax'. Paul Foster, 'Vespasian, Nerva, Jesus, and the *Fiscus Iudaicus*', in David B. Capes et al, *Israel's God and Rebecca's Children: Christology and Community in Early Judaism and Christianity: Essays in Honor of Larry W. Hurtado and Alan F. Segal* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2008), 303-20, see 306-7, see 310. I see the main focus of the legend

under Nerva. The first two issues were within two weeks of Domitian's death.<sup>332</sup>  
This reflected the urgency of the matter.

It would be helpful to pay attention to the whole context of Suet., *Dom.* 12.1-2 to understand the matter.

Reduced to financial straits by the cost of his buildings and shows, as well as by the additions which he had made to the pay of the soldiers,... he had no hesitation in resorting to every sort of robbery. The property of the living and the dead was seized *everywhere* on *any charge* brought by *any accuser*. It was *enough to allege any action or word derogatory to the majesty of the prince*. (12.1) Estates of those in no way connected with him were confiscated, if but one man came forward to declare that he had heard from the deceased during his lifetime that Caesar was his heir. Besides other taxes, *that on the Jews was levied with the utmost rigour*, and those were prosecuted *who without publicly acknowledging that faith yet lived as Jews*, as well as *those who concealed their origin and did not pay the tribute levied upon their people*. I recall being present in my youth when the person of a man ninety years old was examined before the procurator and a very crowded court, to see whether he was circumcised. (12.2, emphasis added)

Exhaustus operum ac munerum inpensis stipendioque, quod adiecerat, temptavit quidem ad relevandos castrenses sumptus numerum militum deminuere;...nihil pensi habuit quin praedaretur omni modo. Bona vivorum ac mortuorum usquequaque quolibet et accusatore et crimine corripiebantur. *Satis erat obici quaecumque factum dictumve adversus maiestatem principis*. (12.1) Confiscabantur alienissimae hereditates vel uno existente, qui diceret audisse se ex defuncto, cum viveret, heredem sibi Caesarem esse. Praetur ceteros *Iudaicus fiscus acerbissime actus est*; ad quem deferebantur, *qui vel inprofessi Iudaicam viverent vitam vel dissimulata origine imposita genti tributa non pendissent*. Interfuisse me adolescentulum memini, cum a procuratore frequentissimoque consilio inspiceretur nonagenarius senex, an circumsectus esset. (12.2, emphasis added)<sup>333</sup>

The Jewish tax is depicted as part of a larger 'lucrative' business of tax collection and property confiscation. The important role of informers in prosecution and confiscation is evident. Informers were certainly involved in the accusations related to the Jewish tax. Accusations had become a widespread phenomenon (Suet., *Dom.*

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to be indicating the abatement of false/malicious accusations in relation to the tax, rather than on any change in the tax system.

<sup>332</sup> Williams, 200.

<sup>333</sup> Rolfe, LCL.

12.1). Cass. Dio, 68.1.2-3 confirms that informers played an important role in regard to tax accusations. These informers had played along with Domitian's avarice (Suet., *Dom.* 12.1).

The crowded court where a ninety-year-old man was examined for the mark of circumcision reflected the public interest in the tax matter, a rigorous prosecution by officials and their eagerness to receive accusations. It is likely that such an embarrassing inquisition was not an isolated incident. One can see too that the mark of circumcision was an important criterion for the matter of tax liability.

There has been much discussion on the identities of the two categories denounced in relation to the Jewish tax in Suet., *Dom.* 12.2:<sup>334</sup>

- (1) those who 'without publicly acknowledging that faith yet lived as Jews' (*inprofessi Iudaicam viverent vitam*);<sup>335</sup> and
- (2) those who 'concealed their origin and did not pay the tribute levied upon their people' (*dissimulata origine imposita genti tributa non pependissent*).<sup>336</sup>

### 1.2.1. Identifying the First Category

The identity of the first category in Suet., *Dom.* 12.2 seems puzzling. This category consists of people who merely lived like Jews but denied connections to the Jewish faith. Their inherent disassociation from the 'Jewish faith' (i.e., not professing it) stands in contrast with their adherence of Jewish customs. A large number of those practising the Jewish customs outside Judaism could have been *Jews or ex-proselytes* converted to Christianity and *Christian judaizers* (gentiles). It would appear to be practically beneficial for Jews and proselytes to keep the Jewish customs even after conversion to Christianity, since Judaism provided them the freedom to practice a monotheistic faith. These, when interrogated, did not go to the extent of claiming Judaism instead of Christianity as their faith. Some gentile Christians could also have hoped to feign association with Judaism by judaizing as an excuse for their monotheistic faith. In normal times, such behaviour would not have caused any

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<sup>334</sup> For various positions, L. A. Thompson, 'Domitian and the Jewish Tax', 329-42.

<sup>335</sup> Rolfe, LCL.

<sup>336</sup> Rolfe, LCL.

problems, but during the rigorous exaction of the Jewish tax, their Jewish ways were being interpreted as a sign of tax liability and created problems for them.

Michele Murray's thesis establishes active judaizing in certain Christian communities in the first and second century.<sup>337</sup> We use her definition of 'judaizers' here:

Gentiles who "live like Jews" by observing various components of the Mosaic law, such as keeping the Sabbath or certain food laws, without fully converting to Judaism and becoming Jews.<sup>338</sup>

Judaizing was significant in Asia Minor at the turn of the first to the second century.<sup>339</sup> Ignatius' letters to the Magnesians and Philadelphians of western Asia Minor contain polemic against judaizing.<sup>340</sup> The dialogue of Justin Martyr with Trypho composed in the second century<sup>341</sup> reflects a category of Christian Jews who had forced gentile Christians to adopt Jewish customs (*Dial.* 47.3).<sup>342</sup> Already during the mid first century, judaizing groups were actively at work among the churches. Even the Apostle Peter was afraid of antagonizing the 'circumcision' group that had come from Jerusalem to Antioch, and he withdrew from table fellowship with the gentiles (Gal 2:11-13). Paul accuses Peter of forcing gentiles to follow Jewish customs. He says to Peter: 'How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?' (πῶς τὰ ἔθνη ἀναγκάζεις ἰουδαΐζειν; Gal 2:14). Furthermore, Josephus (*C. Ap.* 2.282-84) boasts of the widespread adoption of Jewish customs in every city and nation. Seneca is said to lament that the Jewish custom 'is received throughout all the world' (*per omnes... terras recepta sit*).<sup>343</sup> Despite elements of exaggeration in these statements of Josephus and Seneca, they nevertheless reflect some truth of a judaizing trend in the imperial world.

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<sup>337</sup> See Michele Murray, *Playing a Jewish Game: Gentile Christian Judaizing in the First and Second Centuries CE* (SCJ 113; Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2004), 5-6.

<sup>338</sup> Murray, 4. Up to the end of the first century, the word *ioudaizein* (to judaize) still meant 'to be like a Jew' and not 'to be a Jew'. See Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness*, 182.

<sup>339</sup> Murray, 77-99.

<sup>340</sup> More in ch. 5, § 1.2. See Murray, 83-91.

<sup>341</sup> Murray, 91.

<sup>342</sup> See Murray, 95.

<sup>343</sup> Seneca quoted in August. *Civ.* 6.11 (Green et al., LCL).

The text in view does not state the nature of the offence for the first category in Suet., *Dom.* 12.2, only a description of those who were accused. Tax evasion is explicitly applied only to the second category. So we are left to speculate the nature of the offence in the first category. Basically, the following could be implicated.

- (1) Jews or proselytes converted to Christianity but still maintaining Jewish customs could have been accused of tax evasion if they had lapsed in their tax payment because of their dissociation from Judaism. To a lesser extent, if these Jews or proselytes who have converted to Christianity were still making tax payments,<sup>344</sup> they could nonetheless still be accused of *maiestas* (treason) for feigning association with Judaism as an excuse from imperial sacrifices. This act of pretence (to avoid participation in the imperial cult) could be seen as a form of disloyalty and interpreted as harbouring subversive intentions against the emperor.
- (2) To a lesser degree, Christian judaizers (gentiles) adopting Jewish customs and not professing Judaism<sup>345</sup> could have been *wrongly* accused in relation to the tax as well. If the judicial system was sound, these would not normally be found guilty of tax evasion since they were not liable. However, they could be accused of purposely avoiding participation in the imperial cult by affiliating with the Jewish community. This would mean disloyalty to the emperor.<sup>346</sup>

True or false charges were both welcome during the last years of Domitian, especially if the accused was wealthy.

#### **L. A. Thompson**

L. A. Thompson provides a slightly broader identification of the first category in Suet., *Dom.* 12.2, but effectively arrives at a very similar identification of those in the first category as mainly Jews/ex-proselytes converting to Christianity.

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<sup>344</sup> The pericope in Matt 17:24-27, though centred on the temple tax, could be addressing the question of whether Christian Jews should pay the Jewish tax. It was suggested that the Gospel of Matthew was most likely written in the time of Domitian when the tax was exacted rigorously. The stance expressed in the pericope was that Christian Jews were to cooperate with the Roman authorities and pay the tax. See Foster, 312-15.

<sup>345</sup> Smallwood, *The Jews*, 377.

<sup>346</sup> Scott, *The Imperial Cult*, 130.

Thompson suggests that those accused of ‘Jewish life’ were in fact not living a Jewish life but were only *alleged* (thought falsely) to do so.<sup>347</sup> As these did not profess Judaism, they could be Jews who still bore some marks of their past identity, such as circumcision and, more visibly, food preferences. Thus, the category includes, besides apostate Jews, circumcised gentiles (*peregrini*)<sup>348</sup> who were *falsely* identified as members of the Jewish community and *wrongly* reported for tax evasion.<sup>349</sup> In a climate that welcomed any sort of lucrative accusation, such cases of wrong accusations could have been common.

Since people of non-Jewish birth were unlikely to be liable for the tax of the Jews (unless they were once proselytes), the *predominant* groups accused of tax evasion or *maiestas*<sup>350</sup> would be apostate *Jews* and *proselytes*, particularly those who had converted to Christianity. Jews converted to paganism—but not Jews converted to Christianity (a religion not recognized by Rome)—could have claimed exemption from the tax. Thompson notes, however, a conflict in financial interest from the viewpoint of the state in allowing an apostate Jew to be ‘exempted’ from the tax.<sup>351</sup> But all along renegade Jews did not pay the temple tax (and hence not the Jewish tax). It was, thus, unlikely that the state could have on financial grounds refused such a tax ‘exemption’. For a Jew/proselyte who renounced Judaism for *paganism*, it would be financially beneficial to declare a change of religious affiliation. A Jew/proselyte converting to Christianity, not a state-recognised religion, could not do so. Because of the impossibility of declaring a conversion to Christianity, Thompson’s premise would effectively identify Jews and proselytes converting to Christianity as the main people in the first category of Suet., *Dom.* 12.2 who were accused. Acceding to Thompson’s idea of *wrongful* allegations, some pagans who somehow suspected of Jewish lifestyle could have been brought to court.

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<sup>347</sup> Likewise, Goodman, ‘The *Fiscus Iudaicus*’, 174.

<sup>348</sup> L. A. Thompson, ‘Domitian and the Jewish Tax’, 340.

<sup>349</sup> L. A. Thompson, ‘Domitian and the Jewish Tax’, 338.

<sup>350</sup> See §1.2.1, point (1).

<sup>351</sup> L. A. Thompson, 339.



### **E. Mary Smallwood**

Smallwood's analysis suggests that the category that adopted Jewish customs and yet did not profess the Jewish faith refers to 'judaizers'.<sup>352</sup> These are seen to involve 'loose adherents of Judaism, clinging to its fringes by the adoption of monotheism, Sabbath-observance, dietary laws and the major requirements of the moral code, but shrinking away from the decisive commitment of stamping themselves as Jews'.<sup>353</sup> It is possible that, given the rigorous exaction of the tax, these people at the fringes of the Jewish communities, though not previously within the tax system, were also harassed in the matter of tax payment. Smallwood proposes that Domitian had *extended* the tax to 'judaizers' in his 'rigorous exaction'.<sup>354</sup> This, then, had resulted in a surge of reports on gentile 'judaizers'. But an *official* extension of the tax to gentiles adopting Jewish customs who were not Jewish proselytes seem unlikely for the following reasons:

- (1) Foremost, the Jewish tax was an ethnic tax on practising Jews/Jewish proselytes as full members of the Jewish community.
- (2) In practical terms, it would have been difficult to define formally the category of 'judaizers', since different degrees of adherence to Jewish customs were possible.
- (3) More significantly, many of these private accusations were finally judged as *calumnia* (wrongful/malicious accusations), reflected in the Nervan coinage, and the accusers suffered execution—an extreme punishment. This would have been unfair if the accusers had simply acted according to a posited new tax policy by Domitian. The great number of *wrongful* accusations of *maiestas* and adopting Jewish custom/lifestyle with the accompanying charges of ἁθεότης (Dio Cass. 67.14.2) would have included accusations in relation to the Jewish tax (cf. Suet., *Dom.* 12.1-2).

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<sup>352</sup> Smallwood, *The Jews*, 376-77.

<sup>353</sup> Smallwood, *The Jews*, 206. Smallwood's definition of 'judaizers' pertains to sympathizers to Judaism and its practices.

<sup>354</sup> Smallwood, *The Jews*, 377.

While it may be unlikely that Domitian had extended the incidence of the tax to (gentile) ‘judaizers’ (not converted as proselytes)<sup>355</sup> or to any other previously untaxed group, Smallwood has raised an important point that ‘judaizers’ were affected in the matter of the Jewish tax. I surmise that the rigorous tax collection could have caused judaizers (an ambiguous group) mingling with the synagogal community to be noticed. In normal times, judaizers, including Christian judaizers, might have tagged along with the Jewish community without receiving much attention. But rigorous exaction of the tax resulted in the need to distinguish the liable from the non-labile. Tensions could have been fuelled by the thought that Christians were using Judaism as cover for their faith. Some opportunists, perhaps for personal or other reasons, could have taken the chance to get even with their enemies by accusing them wrongfully of various offences.

From the above, it seems probable that within the first category accused, many *Christian Jews (and ex-proselytes)* already within the tax system could have been implicated in the first category of *Dom. 12.1*. These could have been, on the one hand, reported by informers for tax evasion if their payment had ceased for some time because of their dissociation from the Jewish community. On the other hand, *Christian Jews* who had continued to pay the tax yet no longer professing Judaism might have been interpreted as taking cover under Judaism to avoid participation in the imperial cult. To some extent, *Christian judaizers* (gentiles) could similarly be suspected of using Judaism as cover to avoid imperial sacrifices. Non-participation in the imperial cult without a valid reason could be understood as threatening the stability of Domitian’s throne, and could have amounted to the charge of *maiestas*. Some accusations could have come from within the synagogal community. Accusations could also come from any member of the public who bore a grudge against a particular Christian and wanted to get even with him or her.

### 1.2.2. Identifying the Second Category

The identity of the *second* category accused by informers (Suet., *Dom. 12.2*) is less disputed. These were ethnic Jews who had concealed their Jewish origins<sup>356</sup> and did

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<sup>355</sup> Likewise, Keresztes, 3; Martin Goodman, ‘Nerva, the Fiscus Judaicus and Jewish Identity’, *JRS* (1989): 40-44, see 40; M. Ginsburg, 288.

<sup>356</sup> Some had tried to conceal their circumcision by means of an epispasm, or wearing a *fibula* or *aluta*. L. A. Thompson, ‘Domitian and the Jewish Tax’, 338; Smallwood, *The Jews*, 376.

not pay the Jewish tax.<sup>357</sup> For a communal religion like Judaism, to conceal one's Jewish origins by not practising the customs or professing Judaism amounted to deserting the faith. Two possibilities for the identity of the second category are:

- (1) Jews who had converted to Christianity and no longer observed Jewish customs; and
- (2) Jews who had lapsed into paganism and were no longer observant of Jewish customs.<sup>358</sup>

Given the Jewish origin of members within such a category, their names should have been on the tax register, unless their conversion was declared and the tax register updated. As mentioned above, declaring conversion to Christianity would not have been a legitimate move since Christianity was not a *religio licita*. Here again, Jews who became Christians remained the predominant victims of accusations. They could not have legitimately been excused the tax even if they had wanted to. One wonders how they had concealed their origins (Suet., *Dom.* 12.2) and had managed to stop paying tax for some time. Since the tax register was documented according to community groups (such as families/households<sup>359</sup>), some of these evaders might have moved out of their original community and escaped the tax. But because of a rigorous exaction of the tax during Domitian's time, these could have been sought out.

From the analysis above, both categories in Suet., *Dom.* 12.2 accused in relation to the Jewish tax were mainly *Jews or proselytes who had left the Jewish faith and embraced Christianity*. This means that Christian Jews made up a

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<sup>357</sup> Goodman similarly sees these to be ethnic Jews who had 'publicly given up public identification with their religion'. Goodman, 'Nerva, the Fiscus Judaicus', 41.

<sup>358</sup> Similarly, Smallwood identifies this category which hid their Jewish origins and evaded the tax as apostate Jews. Smallwood, *The Jews*, 376.

<sup>359</sup> This is reflected in the list of taxpayers drawn up according to families for a quarter of the Apollonius' camp' in Arsinoë by *amphodarches* in Arsinoë. *CPJ* 2:204-8. Family relationships could also be seen in some tax receipts, e.g., *CPJ* 2:121, no. 170. The receipt consists of the Jewish tax and *ἀπαρχαί* paid for two sons and a grandson of Antonius Rufus. But year by year, the collection of tax for this family might not have been in the same way. Compare, *CPJ* 2:122-25, nos. 162, 164, 170, 172-178, 181-182. Perhaps, at certain times, the taxes were paid collectively, and other times by individuals in the family. There are also instances when tax receipts reflect isolated payers (e.g., *CPJ* 2:120, nos. 165 and 166) or a couple of names of no apparent relation (e.g., *CPJ* 2:120, no. 167). But on the whole, family or communal relationships are denoted either by lineage reflected in names and/or in some form of grouping.

significant proportion of those accused in relation to the Jewish tax issue. Christian judaizers could also have been wrongly accused with regard to the tax.

### 1.3. Other accusations of Jewish lifestyle, ἀθεότης or ἀσεβεία and maiestas

We see besides the accusations of the Jewish tax offences, the charge of ‘Jewish lifestyle or custom’ is prevalent during the last years of Domitian’s rule. Cassius Dio attests to this:<sup>360</sup>

Nerva also released all who were on trial for maiestas and restored the exiles; moreover, he put to death all the slaves and the freedmen who had conspired against their masters and allowed that class of persons to lodge no complaint whatever against their masters; and no persons were permitted to accuse anybody of maiestas or of adopting the Jewish mode of life. Many of those who had been informers were condemned to death, among others Seras, the philosopher...

καὶ ὁ Νέρουας τοὺς τε κρινομένους ἐπ’ ἀσεβείᾳ ἀφῆκε καὶ τοὺς φεύγοντας κατήγαγε, τοὺς τε δούλους καὶ τοὺς ἐξελευθέρους τοὺς τοῖς δεσπότηις σφῶν ἐπιβουλεύσαντας πάντας ἀπέκτεινε. καὶ τοῖς μὲν τοιούτοις οὐδ’ ἄλλο τι ἔγκλημα ἐπιφέρειν ἐπὶ τοὺς δεσπότης ἐφῆκε, τοῖς δὲ δὴ ἄλλοις οὐτ’ ἀσεβείας οὐτ’ Ἰουδαϊκοῦ βίου κατατιᾶσθαι τινὰς συνεχώρησε. πολλοὶ δὲ καὶ τῶν συκοφαντησάντων θάνατον κατεδικάσθησαν· ἐν οἷς καὶ Σέρας ἦν ὁ φιλόσοφος.

Slaves and freemen conspired against their masters for personal benefit.<sup>361</sup>

Philosophers seized the opportunity to topple high-standing officials whom they opposed. Accusations were so widespread and severe that ‘everybody was accusing everybody else’ (ἐκ τοῦ πάντας πάντων κατηγορεῖν; Cass. Dio, 68.1.3)! Williams rightly infers, ‘False accusations on “Jewish lifestyle” must have reached scandalous proportions by the end of Domitian’s reign.’<sup>362</sup>

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<sup>360</sup> Cass. Dio, 68.1.2 (Cary, LCL). Ἀσεβεία is translated as *maiestas* here. It highlights an aspect of ‘impiety’: that towards the emperor.

<sup>361</sup> Upon successful prosecution, the *delator* would receive part of the property confiscated from the accused. Great financial gains could be reaped if the accused was wealthy. See the abuse of accusatory activities in the Roman Empire, Rutledge, 39-43; also L. A. Thompson, ‘Domitian and the Jewish Tax’, 342. De Ste Croix comments on the major role of *private* denouncers in the prosecution of Christians, The legal system was “‘accusatory’ and not ‘inquisitional’: a governor would not normally take action until a formal denunciation (*delatio nominis*) was issued by a *delator*.” De Ste Croix, 15.

<sup>362</sup> Williams, 200.

Accusations of *'maiestas'* and of Jewish 'customs/lifestyle' (ἥθη/βίος) were rampant in late Domitianic time (Suet., *Dom.* 12.1; Dio, 67.14.2; 68.1.2). The former offence might have been for various suspicions of disloyalty to the emperor. This could have included, specifically, the refusal to participate in the imperial cult. In Cassius Dio's description, '[M]any others [besides Domitilla and Clemens] drifting into Jewish customs' (ἄλλοι ἐς τὰ τῶν Ἰουδαίων ἤδη ἐξοκέλλοντες πολλοὶ)<sup>363</sup> were condemned of 'ἀθεότης' (Cass. Dio 67.14.2). The term 'ἐξοκέλλοντες' gives an image of a ship 'running aground'. Metaphorically, it means 'drifting into'.<sup>364</sup> It signifies a kind of movement/attraction towards Jewish customs/lifestyle by *non-Jews*, which later posed problems during Domitian's last years. Jews naturally kept their customs from birth, so the image of 'movement towards' seems less likely to be applied to them. These 'many' accused of 'drifting into' Jewish customs could be Judaizers or proselytes to Judaism. But, again, proselytes were full members of the Jewish community, and they had the backing of the synagogal community they belonged when accusations arose. It is likely that of these many accused were (gentile) judaizers, particularly *Christian judaizers*, as the last category were the most vulnerable to accusations of ἀθεότης and *maiestas*. The charge of ἀθεότης that was in relation to their Jewish lifestyle could have been applied to a disregard for pagan and imperial worship. Although Judaism and Christianity both are monotheistic in outlook, Judaism was a recognised ancestral religion by Rome, and its monotheistic stance was generally tolerated. Moreover, synagogues were socially adept in the pluralistic society. They had established ways of honouring the emperor, but not the churches which were not yet recognised by Rome.<sup>365</sup> Christian non-participation in pagan and imperial cults could have been taken as a sign of 'ἀθεότης' and of *maiestas*. By not participating in pagan and imperial cults, Christians offend their pluratheistic neighbours and they could be suspected of harbouring subversive intentions against the emperor.

Elsewhere in 68.1.2, Cassius Dio speaks of the same scenario in which 'many' were wrongfully accused, but there he pairs up ἀσέβεια and 'Jewish lifestyle' (Ἰουδαϊκός βίος). He substitutes ἀσέβεια for ἀθεότης (as in 67.14.2). He

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<sup>363</sup> Cary, LCL.

<sup>364</sup> LSJ, 597. Lexical form: 'ἐξοκέλλω'.

<sup>365</sup> For these points, see ch. 5, §1.3.

seems to use the two terms interchangeably. Both ἀθεότης and ἀσέβεια can concern the reluctance to honour pagan or imperial deities. *Pagan judaizers*, without a full conversion to Judaism, probably would not have held a monotheistic outlook, and would be still open to worshipping pagan and imperial deities. As such, of the ‘many’ accused in relation to ‘Jewish customs’, ἀθεότης and ἀσέβεια, Christian judaizers were likely a prominent group. We see that the false accusations were brought by members of their household or the public (Cass. Dio, 68.1.2).

Generally speaking, ‘there were laws against calumny (*calumnia*, malicious prosecution) and accusers might be tortured’, but

opportunistic accusations were inevitable. The senate properly handled most cases of treason, but the emperors reserved the right to protect themselves, and they could easily dominate or bypass senatorial trials.<sup>366</sup>

Domitian, unlike Nerva, had allowed the false accusations to breed in order to replenish the depleted imperial treasury.<sup>367</sup> Such accusations frequently led to the confiscation of property, besides banishment and death. He often bypassed the senate in matters of sentencing and execution (see Cass. Dio, 67.11.2-3). This caused false accusations to proliferate, and contributed to the unfair trials for adopting Jewish customs, for ἀθεότης or *maiestas*.

Even high-standing Christians could have been implicated in such charges. The passage in Cass. Dio, 67.14.1-3 describes two specific charges of ἀθεότης: that against Flavia Domitilla (Domitian’s relative, according to Cassius Dio) and her husband, Flavius Clemens (Domitian’s cousin). Suetonius (*Dom.* 15.1) attributes the death of Clemens to political suspicion instead. It has been disputed whether they were Christians or adherents to Judaism.<sup>368</sup> Domitilla was exiled to the island of Pandateria, while Clemens was executed.<sup>369</sup> The reticence of Suetonius on Domitilla

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<sup>366</sup> Kyle, 98.

<sup>367</sup> See Kyle, 99.

<sup>368</sup> For various views, see Keresztes, 7-8. For views of Domitilla and Clemens as Christians, McFayden, 60; Ludwig Hertling and Engelbert Kirschbaum, *The Roman Catacombs and their Martyrs* (trans. M. Joseph Costelloe; London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1960), 248-49, n. 6. For views that Clemens was a proselyte to Judaism, see Smallwood, ‘Domitian’s Attitude’, 7-8. Brent argues that it was understandable that Cassius Dio did not mention Flavius and Domitilla to be Christians since Christianity was not mentioned throughout his work, and that Christianity might have appeared as a form of Judaism, whose distinction was not crucial to him. Brent, *The Imperial Cult*, 142.

<sup>369</sup> Rutledge, 155.

could be due to selective depiction. According to Eusebius (*Hist. Eccl.* 3.18.4-5) of the fourth century, Domitilla (who was described as the niece of Flavius Clemens) was exiled with many others to the island of Pontia in about 95 C.E. (fifteenth year of Domitian's rule) for her testimony to Christ. This date coheres with Cassius Dio's account, which was the year before Domitian died (cf. Cass. Dio, 67.14.5). Eusebius, a Christian historian, interestingly makes no mention of Clemens.<sup>370</sup> A Christian tradition, *Acts of Nereus and Achilles* of the Middle Ages narrates the banishment of Domitilla and her two eunuch servants to the island of Terracina. Her two servants were beheaded and she was burnt to death.<sup>371</sup> The sources in Eusebius' *Church History* and the *Acts of Nereus and Achilles* claim Domitilla to be a Christian martyr.

From Cassius Dio's description, both Domitilla and Clemens were charged with 'ἀθεότης', which 'many others who *drifted into Jewish ways* were condemned' (ἄλλοι ἐς τὰ τῶν Ἰουδαίων ἤδη ἐξοκέλλοντες πολλοὶ κατεδικάσθησαν; Cass. Dio, 67.14.2; emphasis mine). Cassius Dio depicts Domitilla and Clemens belonging to the 'many' thus charged. I explained above that Christian judaizers likely comprised of the 'many' so condemned.

A Jew or even a proselyte could not be rightly charged with keeping Jewish customs since Judaism was an ancient religion respected by the Roman legislation.<sup>372</sup> So at the point of being accused, Domitilla (a gentile) could have become a Christian. This could have been so for Clemens too, based on the information from Cass. Dio, 67.14.2. Differently, Keresztes holds the idea that Domitilla and Clemens were both converts to Judaism. He notes that Jews were also called 'atheists' by mobs and writers,<sup>373</sup> but he accedes, '[T]he terms "atheism" and "Jewish ways" could and certainly did often mean Christianity for the mobs of the Greek settlements of the East, and particularly Asia'.<sup>374</sup> Scholars holding the view that one or both of the couple had Christian affiliation would often explain that they were not likely charged as adherents to Judaism since the Jewish faith was a recognised religion.<sup>375</sup>

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<sup>370</sup> Knudsen, 17-18. This article includes a good survey of literature on the martyrdom of Domitilla.

<sup>371</sup> Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, 115.

<sup>372</sup> Similarly, Beale, 8-9.

<sup>373</sup> Keresztes, 9.

<sup>374</sup> Keresztes, 9

<sup>375</sup> See Keresztes, 11.

Charges against proselytes were possible, but the Jewish community would have vouched that these were members of the their community after conversion. If this were so, the many who were charged with adopting Jewish customs and of ἁθεότης were Christians, and Domitilla certainly could have been one of them (cf. Cass. Dio, 67.14.2).

Christian tradition maintained that a Christian catacomb was constructed on the land of Flavius Domitilla on Via Ardeatina (the present day Tor Marancia). The hypogeum had walls dated to the first half of the second century. It formed part of a large Christian necropolis known as the cemetery of Domitilla in antiquity.<sup>376</sup> Among other inscriptions referring to Flavia Domitilla in that area,<sup>377</sup> a fragment of a sepulchral monument in the catacomb contained Domitilla's name.<sup>378</sup> In a fifth or sixth century legend,<sup>379</sup> Nereus and Achilleus (the servants of Domitilla exiled with her) were buried in the cemetery of Domitilla.<sup>380</sup> Though once widely accepted, some now doubt the connection of the cemetery to Flavia Domitilla.<sup>381</sup> A new assessment of the dating shows that the earliest parts of the catacomb are after *ca.* 150 C.E. In addition, the land passed down from Domitilla to her descendants was first used for pagan burials on the surface, and then Christian catacombs took shape below. It was at this later time that the name of Domitilla was applied to it.<sup>382</sup> In any case, Christian tradition claims Domitilla for itself.

Clemens' association with Judaism or Christianity is less clear from the contradictory evidence. Eusebius does not mention Clemens' martyrdom (see *Hist. Eccl.* 18.5). It could be that Eusebius did not consider Clemens a Christian, or that he, though a Christian, had died not for reasons of the faith but for his own misconduct. The silence indicates that Clemens did not die for the faith, but his Christian identity is still possible from the above reasoning. Some argue that

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<sup>376</sup> Hertling and Kirschbaum, 33-4.

<sup>377</sup> such as 'bricks bearing the stamp of a certain Felix, slave of Flavia Domitilla'; and an 'epitaph of a certain Tatia, freedwoman of Domitilla, and the nurse of her mistress' seven children'. Hertling and Kirschbaum, 34.

<sup>378</sup> Knudsen, 23-4.

<sup>379</sup> *Acts of Nereus and Achilles*

<sup>380</sup> Hertling and Kirschbaum, 36.

<sup>381</sup> See E Mary Smallwood, 'Domitian's Attitude', *CP* 51 (1956): 1-13, see 7, 12, n. 24.

<sup>382</sup> Smallwood, 'Domitian's Attitude', 8.



Clemens' 'contemptible laziness' (*contemptissimae inertiae*; Suet., *Dom.* 15.1) was due actually to his Christian faith, which would not allow him to participate in sacrifices in the imperial cult, and caused him to avoid events involving it.<sup>383</sup>

The coupling of the charge of ἄθεότης with adopting Jewish customs in Cass. Dio, 67.14.2 is significant. 'Ἀθεότης' was a charge that many others who drifted into Jewish ways were condemned. One may conjecture a possible context for ἄθεότης and adopting Jewish customs together: *Christian judaizers* were accused (wrongly or rightly) of intentionally avoiding the pagan and imperial sacrifices by feigning affiliation with Judaism. This could be a way explain the charge of *maiestas* or treason. As mentioned, when 'drifting into Jewish ways' (τὰ τῶν Ἰουδαίων ἥδη ἐξοκέλλοντες) and 'ἄθεότης' are coupled,<sup>384</sup> it is quite likely that gentiles/ex-proselytes were being referred to, and not Jews. Judaism's ancestral customs were viewed by Rome as legitimate, and so was Judaism. There existed a 'deep respect for the *mos maiorum* (custom of the fathers/ancestors), which was the cornerstone of both law and piety' in Roman society. So 'extraordinary privileges and exemptions' were granted to Jewish communities 'in virtue of the ethnicity and antiquity of their own ancestral way of life'.<sup>385</sup> In this respect, only an 'imposter' to such a tradition, using it in an illegitimate way, could be accused rightly of adopting 'Jewish ways'. Furthermore as explained, in comparison with the polytheistic pagan judaizers, the monotheistic Christian judaizers were more vulnerable to accusations. Among them, Domitilla was likely one.

It is suggested that a Rabbinic tradition ('*Ab. Zarah* 10b) speaks of Clemens as a Jewish proselyte.<sup>386</sup> It is fascinating that the figure Ketī'a b. Shalom was depicted as an important member of the government and in the counsel of a Roman

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<sup>383</sup> See Hertling and Kirschbaum, 249, n. 6. Laziness is a common accusation against Jews, probably because they needed to keep the Sabbath. For a list of other common accusations, see Paula Fredriksen, 'What "Parting of the Ways"? Jews, Gentiles, and the Ancient Mediterranean City' in Adam H. Becker, and Annette Yoshiko Reed (eds.), *The Ways that Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (TSAJ 95; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 35-63, see 41.

<sup>384</sup> Cass. Dio, 67.14.2.

<sup>385</sup> Fredriksen, 60; see also Schoedel, 312 and n. 37.

<sup>386</sup> Gottheil and Krauss, 406. Jacobson makes a different suggestion that the incident in '*Ab. Zarah* 10b occurs not in the time of Domitian but Hadrian. Howard Jacobson, 'Ketiah Bar Shalom', *AJSR* (1981): 39-42, see 40.

emperor who hated the Jews.<sup>387</sup> This figure spoke for the Jews and was sentenced to death for it. On the way, he was denounced for not paying a certain tax, was circumcised, and thrown into a furnace. He was a follower of Rabbi Akiba, since he left his inheritance to Akiba and Akiba's colleagues. A rabbi commented on the unfairness that he had acquired eternity in one hour, whilst others only after years. In fact, the account depicts him as having been circumcised just before his death.<sup>388</sup> This reveals his identity as a proselyte before he died. His wife was also a convert to Judaism.<sup>389</sup> Interesting points of contact between Ketī'a b. Shalom and Flavius Clemens exist. It has also been suggested that Clemens was the 'pious senator' who committed suicide to avert a misfortune threatening Jews at Rome in *Deut. Rab.* 10.<sup>390</sup> But this account would conflict with Cassius Dio's account that Clemens was executed by Domitian (Suet., *Dom.* 15.1). Smallwood notes that Clemens could possibly have been the proselyte named Onkelos, or alternatively called 'son of Kalonikos' (בר קלוניקוס) who was a nephew of Titus, whom the emperor had three times attempted to arrest (*Git* 56b and *'Ab. Zarah* 11a).<sup>391</sup> This seems unlikely since Clemens was said to be the 'cousin' (ἀνεψιός) of Domitian (Cass. Dio, 67.14.1, *Dom.* 15.1), while Onkelos is said to be Domitian's nephew, and in fact, the son of Titus' (and Domitian's) sister (*Git* 56b). We, nonetheless, see some high-standing proselytes or Christian judaizers in Domitian's extended family.<sup>392</sup>

Could Domitilla and Clemens have been accused for being proselytes to Judaism? Keresztes cautions that Rome followed 'a consistent policy of trying to limit Judaism to those born into it' and 'denied the proselytes the right and privileges which it granted to Jews'. These proselytes would be 'punished according to general rule' if they 'refused to perform the acts of worship of official and imperial cults when officially called upon'.<sup>393</sup> If Keresztes' claim is correct that proselytes did *not*

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<sup>387</sup> For the comment that some hostility between an emperor, possibly Domitian, and the Jews is reflected in Talmudic and Midrashic writings. See Smallwood, 'Domitian's Attitude', 1.

<sup>388</sup> Smallwood, 'Domitian's Attitude', 9.

<sup>389</sup> Smallwood, 'Domitian's Attitude', 8.

<sup>390</sup> Gottheil and Krauss, 406.

<sup>391</sup> Smallwood, 'Domitian's Attitude', 8, 12-3, n.33; A. E. Silverstone, *Aquila and Onkelos* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1931), 10, 12.

<sup>392</sup> Furthermore, Titus, Domitian's brother had an infamous romantic relationship with Berenice, the sister of Agrippa II, who was Jewish (*Div. Tit.* 7.1; Cass. Dio, 66.18.1). Crook, 166-68. Jews, such as Flavius Josephus and Agrippa II had close relationships with both Vespasian and Titus.

<sup>393</sup> Keresztes, 13.

enjoy the rights of born-Jews to practise the requirements of their religion, then Domitilla and Clemens could certainly have been punished as proselytes to Judaism, and not as Christians.

Conversely, the protection of proselytes as part of Judaism could be supported on the following grounds:

- (1) The tax was set up as a continuation of the temple tax which proselytes, besides the born Jews, had paid.<sup>394</sup> Proselytes were largely treated as an inherent part of a Jewish community, participating fully in its religious life.
- (2) This Jewish tax, legitimising the practice of the Jewish religion, was instituted by Vespasian the founder of the Flavian dynasty, who was also Domitian's father. It was likely that Domitian neither widened nor restricted the incidence of the tax. This would otherwise have disrupted the continuity of the Flavian policies and the image of a close-knit dynasty. Moreover, a change in tax policy would have caused some amount of commotion, but no such commotion was documented; nor was any specific change mentioned. Domitian was just said to have exacted the tax with utmost rigour, which presumably just meant 'to tax all who were liable'.
- (3) Furthermore, the policy of allowing Jews to practise their customs unhindered followed a long tradition that was supported, if not legislated, by Julius Caesar and affirmed by subsequent emperors of both the Julio-Claudian and Flavian dynasties (e.g., by Claudius, Vespasian and Titus).<sup>395</sup>

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<sup>394</sup> Similarly, Smallwood accedes that the Jewish tax applied to proselytes. Smallwood, 'Domitian's attitude', 2; Smallwood, *The Jews*, 376. Furthermore, names of Jewish, Greek, Egyptian and Roman ethnicities appeared as taxpayers of the Jewish tax in the Edfu ostraka. See *CPJ* 2:116-18. Some Jews could have adopted the names of other nationalities. But some of these names could have indicated proselytes to Judaism.

<sup>395</sup> Tessa Rajak, 'Was there a Roman Charter for the Jews?' *JRS* 74 (1984): 107-123, esp. 109-120. No doubt, some portrayal of the universal nature of benefits to the Jews may be coloured by Josephus' propagandistic or rhetorical purposes. One cannot, however, deny the weight of the evidence that Judaism was a recognised religion by Rome. Wilson, maintains that there was 'no evidence for a change in legal status of the Jews after 70 C.E.'. He writes about the aftermath of the Jewish War,

Diaspora Judaism was scarcely affected. True, there were skirmishes between Jews and Greeks in Antioch, Alexandria, and Cyrene (Josephus *Bell.* 7.46ff., 409ff., 437ff.), but in the last resort the Romans always upheld the traditional privileges of the Jews.

Stephen G. Wilson, *Related Strangers: Jews and Christians 70-170 CE*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 4. Rutgers suggests that the clashes of Roman authority with Jews in Rome under Tiberius and Claudius' time were primarily to maintain law and order, rather than to interfere with the Jewish practices and beliefs. Leonard Victor Rutgers, 'Roman Policy toward the Jews: Expulsions from the

It would seem that proselytes, as full members of the synagogal community, did continue to enjoy the rights of Judaism. It follows that the suspect of ‘Jewish ways’ and the charge of ‘ἀθεότης’ pertaining to Domitilla and many others was mainly directed at Christians who maintained the Jewish customs, rather than at adherents of Judaism. If this were so, the many charged with ‘ἀθεότης’ (Cass. Dio, 67.14.2) for taking on Jewish customs would coincide, in a respect, with those accused in the first category of *Dom.* 12.1 (those who lived like Jews but did not profess Judaism, whom I argue, consisted of a significant number of Christians adopting Jewish customs); even though Cassius Dio does not make a connection with the tax issue in his description.

One other named person, also implicated in ‘the same crimes as most of the others’ (κατηγορηθέντα τά τε ἄλλα καὶ οἷα οἱ πολλοὶ; Cass. Dio, 67.14.3)<sup>396</sup> was Acilius Glabrio (Cass. Dio, 67.12.1). Besides his ἀθεότης, he had also angered Domitian with his success at fighting a lion, being forced by Domitian to fight as a gladiator.<sup>397</sup> Ludwig and Kirschbaum gather inscriptional evidence of Acilius Glabrio possibly being buried in an ancient catacomb of Priscilla in Via Salaria.<sup>398</sup> Smallwood, however, points out that the inscriptions of ‘the definitely Christian Acilii’ are dated third century or later.<sup>399</sup>

Though one can never be sure of the religious affiliation of Domitilla, Clemens or Glabrio, one suspects that they were, like the many accused of Jewish ways/lifestyle and ‘ἀθεότης’, Christian judaizers.<sup>400</sup> As mentioned above, Jews could not be easily accused of ‘Jewish ways’ (and less so of ‘drifting into’ such ways). Jewish customs were part and parcel of their ancestral religion. ‘Ἀθεότης’ may at times be applied to Jews, but it more naturally applied to Christians, who did not have the backing of an ancestral tradition for their faith. Christians could have been accused for a number of reasons during the spate of *culmny*, but Christians

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City of Rome during the First Century C.E.’, in Karl P. Donfried and Peter Richardson, *Judaism and Christianity in First-Century Rome* (Grand Rapids: Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998), 93-116, see esp. 107.

<sup>396</sup> Cary, LCL.

<sup>397</sup> It is unusual that Glabrio would have been invited by the Domitian to fight with as a gladiator in the arena—a demeaning job unfit for people of high status—while he was still a consul.

<sup>398</sup> For the details, see Hertling and Kirschbaum, 38-40; Smallwood, ‘Domitian’s Attitude’, 9.

<sup>399</sup> Smallwood, ‘Domitian’s Attitude’, 9.

<sup>400</sup> Clemens’ affiliation to Christianity is less certain since Christian tradition does not attest him as a martyr.

maintaining Jewish customs could have been brought to attention given the rigorous tax exaction. To add to the woes of the Christians, we further see Christian Jews being implicated in a short spate of persecution directed by the emperor himself.

## **2. Domitian's Persecution of Davidic Descendents Affecting Jewish Christians**

Eusebius writes of Domitian persecuting Christians ('us') in *Hist. Eccl.* 3.17:<sup>401</sup>

When Domitian had given many proofs of his great cruelty and had put to death without any reasonable trial no small number of men distinguished at Rome by family and career, and had punished without a cause myriads of other notable men by banishment and confiscation of their property, he finally showed himself the successor of Nero's campaign of hostility to God. He was the second to promote persecution against us, though his father, Vespasian, had planned no evil against us.

Πολλήν γε μὴν εἰς πολλοὺς ἐπιδειξάμενος ὁ Δομετιανὸς ὁμότητα οὐκ ὀλίγον τε τῶν ἐπὶ Ῥώμης εὐπατριδῶν τε καὶ ἐπισήμων ἀνδρῶν πλῆθος οὐ μετ' εὐλόγου κρίσεως κτείνας μυρίους τε ἄλλους ἐπιφανεῖς ἄνδρας ταῖς ὑπὲρ τὴν ἐνορίαν ζημιώσας φυγαῖς καὶ ταῖς τῶν οὐσιῶν ἀποβολαῖς ἀναιτίως, τελευτῶν τῆς Νέρωνος θεοεχθρίας τε καὶ θεομαχίας διάδοχον ἑαυτὸν κατεστήσατο. δεύτερος δὴ τὰ τὸν καθ' ἡμῶν ἀνεκίνει διωγμὸν, καίπερ τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτῷ Οὐεσπασιανοῦ μηδὲν καθ' ἡμῶν ἄτοπον ἐπινοήσαντος.

Significantly, here Eusebius relates the persecution of the Christians together with the execution of the notable and wealthy (not restricted to Christians) and the confiscation of their property. He further writes of the exile of John the evangelist at the end of the reign of Domitian (3.18.1), the death of a Flavia Domitilla and her exile with 'many others' (πλείστων ἐτέρων; 3.18.5; sounds like Cass. Dio, 67.14.2). His description coheres with other sources on the crisis of calumny that happened late in Domitian's reign. Though the name of the island where Domitilla was exiled, and her relationship with Clemens differ from the account in Cass. Dio, 67.14,<sup>402</sup> the many correspondences between Eusebius and Cassius Dio's accounts, including the same year of 95 C.E. (15<sup>th</sup> year of Domitian's reign; Euseb., *Hist. Eccl.* 3.18.5), make it very likely that the same context of widespread calumny is being

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<sup>401</sup> Lake, LCL.

<sup>402</sup> In Eusebius, Domitilla is banished to Pontia instead of Pandateria; and she is described as the niece of Flavius Clemens instead of his wife (*Hist. Eccl.* 3.18.5).

referred to. And he remarks that it is in this context of ‘persecution’ that John, the author of Revelation, was ‘condemned to dwell on the island of Patmos in consequence of his testimony to the divine word’. In our construction above, Jewish and gentile Christians were seen to be suffering in one way or other towards the end of his reign.

Following in *Hist. Eccl.* 3.19-20, Domitian is said to command the murder of the descendents of David. Some opportunists reported on the descendents of Jude (Jesus’ brother) and in so doing implicated Christian Jews (cf. *Hist. Eccl.* 3.20.1-2). But they were soon released when Domitian saw that the descendents of Jude were both poor and politically harmless (*Hist. Eccl.* 3.20.1-7). He then, in Eusebius’ words, ‘by a decree put a stop to the persecution of the church’ (καταπαῦσαι δὲ διὰ προστάγματος τὸν κατὰ τῆς ἐκκλησίας διωγμόν; *Hist. Eccl.* 3.20.7).<sup>403</sup> Christian Jews were seen to have suffered in relation to the persecution of David’s descendants, in addition to false accusations concerning the Jewish tax matter that had implicated them. The official decree to seek out Jews of Davidic lineage is not documented in Cassius Dio and Suetonius’ accounts, perhaps because it was short-lived and only affected isolated portions of the population. Nonetheless, some repercussions of social pressure for Christian Jews could likely have remained after the decree was withdrawn.

### **3. Conclusion**

We see in the above analysis that there was indeed a time of crisis for Christians in the last years of Domitian. Pliny the Younger’s correspondence to Trajan (*Ep.* 10.96) writes of ‘certain’ Christians having renounced their faith ‘three years ago, certain ones many years ago, and many a one twenty years prior’ (quidam ante triennium, quidam ante plures annos, non nemo etiam ante viginti)<sup>404</sup> that time of about 113 C.E.<sup>405</sup> This gives 93 C.E. as the year when some Christians apostatised.<sup>406</sup> It fits the period of pressure from the imperial cult, the Jewish tax issue and the widespread

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<sup>403</sup> Lake, LCL.

<sup>404</sup> My translation. Radice, LCL.

<sup>405</sup> Murray, 80.

<sup>406</sup> See also Beale, 5.

calumny during late Domitianic time. Jewish and gentile Christians were implicated during this period in the following circumstances:

- (1) accusations in relation to the Jewish tax that mainly implicated Christian Jews but also brought to attention a substantial number of Christian judaizers, who may be accused not in relation to the tax but of ‘ἀθεότης’ or ‘*maiestas*’;
- (2) a spate of calumny centring on accusations of Jewish ways, ‘ἀθεότης’ or ‘*maiestas*’, which perhaps were spurred by the rigorous exaction of the tax and implicated Christians adhering to Jewish ways; and finally
- (3) Domitian’s brief decree to seek and kill Jews of Davidic descent, implicating Christian Jews.

Even if the epicentre of the crisis was in Rome (where directives for the Jewish tax and Domitian’s decree against Davidic descendants were issued), the rigorous exaction of the Jewish tax applied to all Jews in the Roman Empire. Moreover, Cassius Dio describes the situation of calumny during Domitian’s time as intensive and prevalent (68.1.3). Nerva’s issue of coinage to curb the false accusations reveals the impact such calumny had in the imperial world. It may be that Domitian’s lax or even welcoming position to calumnies for financial gain was also adopted by provincial governors. The reluctance to participate in the imperial cult was a convenient reason for the charge of ‘*maiestas*’ against Christians. Such a charge could have been easily used against uncooperative Christians in Asia Minor, especially that the Flavian provincial cult of Asia had begun operations in Ephesus in 90 C.E. (see ch. 3). The cult would have brought the threat of such an accusation right to the door-step of the seven churches of Asia Minor. It was also observed that ‘many’ Christians adhering to Jewish ways were brought to light in relation to the tax matter. Besides tax offences, some were accused of ἀθεότης, ἀσέβεια or *maiestas*. . Furthermore, Domitian’s attitude towards Christian Jews of Davidic descent could also have repercussions empire-wide, even though the decree was carried out only briefly.

The common adherence to Jewish customs/lifestyle by judaizers brought to light during the crisis of rampant accusations during Domitian’s time reflects an on-going judaizing tendency of some Christians in Asia Minor at the turn of the second century. We will see that it is also part of a common judaizing behaviour empire-wide across the centuries. This judaizing tendency brought to light at the end of

Domitian's time, and the social troubles related to Christian non-participation in the imperial cult (a convenient excuse for their condemnation) act as helpful windows to understand the polemical issue against the so-called 'Jews' that I examine in the next chapter. I suggest that some Christian judaizers were associating with the synagogue with their most established position in the society as a way out of the social pressure posed by the imperial cult in Asia Minor. I further argue that such affiliating behaviour with the synagogue is the reason for the author's anti-Judaistic polemic. The synagogue and its Jewish members are relegated to the camp of Satan, and this discourages Christians from such an affiliation.



## Chapter Five: Context of Polemic against the so-called ‘Jews’

In this final chapter of Part Two, some angles provided by the ‘contextual windows’ in the past chapters help to provide a general backdrop for understanding the context of polemic against a main group of contenders, the so-called ‘Jews’. More points in relation to the understanding the underlying issue to this polemic will be developed here.

In Rev 2:9 and 3:9, we see a group claiming to be Jews, but who are denied of their Jewish identity and are attributed to the ‘synagogue of Satan’ (συναγωγὴ τοῦ σατανᾶ). A severe polemic against them is detected. These ‘Jews’ are depicted as being involved in some sort of verbal abuse (slander/blasphemy) against members of the church in Smyrna. ‘Verbal abuse’ in the form of calumny (false accusations) was rampant during the last year of Domitian’s reign. The false accusations were fuelled partly by the social tensions arising from the imperial cult in Asia, coupled with the rampant accusations of ἀθεότης, ἀσέβεια, *maiestas* and the drifting into Jewish customs.

Although I posit that the situation reflected in the ‘letters’ could have been in a time of relative peace after Domitian’s death, the vulnerability of Christians to public accusations remained because of their reluctance to participate in the imperial cult; though at normal times, the pressure was less than in the time of Domitian who had encouraged wrongful accusations. Under the social pressure the imperial cult in Asia, the syngagogues, being better established in the society than Christian churches and recognised to be a lawful group due to their ancestral customs, would have become an ‘attractive other’, as I will suggest. This attractiveness of the synagogue could have been reflected somewhat in the judaizing tendency brought to light during Domitian’s rigorous exaction of the Jewish tax. There was an accompanying need to distinguish between the tax-liable Jew and the non-labile judaizer. We also saw that the accusations of many ‘drifting into Jewish lifestyle’ towards the end of Domitian’s rule reveal a similar judaizing tendency that could have been little noticed beforehand. I argued that many Christian judaizers were among those accused of adopting Jewish customs/lifestyle. The synagogue as the attractive other as a way out for Christians under the pressures from the imperial cult merges with the more general judaizing tendency that was brought to light during Domitian’s time. Of

course, during Domitian's time, judaizing behaviour had become a threat rather than the 'asset' as it normally was in times of peace when false accusations were curbed.

I set the reading of the polemical issue in Revelation in this chapter against this broader backdrop. I will explain how the dual-prohibition in Rev 14:9-12 is interpreted as a warning against imperial worship and synagogue affiliation. This strong dual-prohibition at the threat of hell-fire casts light on the main issue of concern of the author in his polemical delivery against the so-called 'Jews' in the 'letters' (2:9; 3:9).

### **1. *The Dual-Prohibition in Rev 14:9-13***

In the visions, readers are warned repeatedly (1) not to worship the image of the beast, (2) nor to receive the mark of the beast on the forehead or hand (13:15-17; 14:9; 16:2; 19:20; 20:4). The repeated exhortation reveals the author's utmost concern for the matter.

The worship of the beast's image/statue refers apparently to participation in the imperial cult. In Chapter Three (§2) we saw that Domitian employed the ideology of the deification and worship of his family members to strengthen his throne. Besides the temples, sacred places and memorials that he had built specifically for Vespasian and Titus, the establishment of the provincial Flavian temple of Asia in Ephesus, with a colossal statue with the likeness of Titus, fits the promotion of the worship of the 'beast from the sea' by the 'beast from the land'. We established in Chapters two and three that the two beasts could be modelled after Titus and Domitian respectively in a mixture of reality and creativity.

The wearing of the mark of the beast is a more difficult imagery to understand. If worshipping the beast's image/statue reflects some tangible aspect of the Graeco-Roman society, we would expect that the wearing of the mark of the beast also points towards something the late first century readers knew.

#### **1.1. Mark of the beast, the tefillin and Jewish affiliation**

Here, I develop Yarbrow Collins' idea that the wearing of the beast's mark on the forehead or hand (13:16) is a parody on the Jewish custom of wearing the

*tefillin*/phylacteries.<sup>407</sup> The practice of wearing phylacteries/*tefillin* began from second century B.C.E. onwards.<sup>408</sup> In the Tanna'itic Era (70 C.E. to the third century), its use is common and widespread among diverse Jewish groups.<sup>409</sup> But the twist in the author's depiction is this: wearing the 'mark' (χάραγμα) on the 'forehead' (μέτωπον) or 'hand' (χείρ) corresponds to a 'heretical' way of wearing the *tefillin* according to the rabbis.

*M. Megillah* 4.8, with its list of practices of which the rabbis did not approve, provides an outspoken indication of variety in observance: "One who makes his *tefillah* circular; that is a danger and there is no *mitsvah* to it. If he placed it on his forehead or on his palm; that is the way of heresy (*derekh haminut*). If he covered it with gold or placed it on a garment-sleeve; that is the outsiders' way (*derekh hahitsonim*)."<sup>410</sup>

The right way to wear the hand phylactery is to wear it on the highest part of the left arm, and *not* on the hand; the head phylactery is to be worn on the highest part of the head,<sup>411</sup> *rather than* on the forehead or between the eyes.<sup>412</sup> In contrast, the mark of the beast in Revelation is worn on the hand (χείρ) or forehead (μέτωπον). It is said that the 'man of Israel' would wear the *tefillin* on his 'arm' (*T. Berakhot* 6.25). The placement of the mark of the beast resembles the heretical way of wearing the Jewish phylacteries that a 'man of Israel' (Jew) would not do. Not only is the mark depicted as being worn at the wrong place on the limb and head in Rev 13:16-17, it is worn on the wrong hand (the right instead of the left<sup>413</sup>)! We note in the passage *M. Megillah*

<sup>407</sup> Yarbrow Collins suggests the mark of the beast (13:16) to parody and contrast the sealing of the followers of the Lamb (7:3), and also the Jewish phylacteries. As author of Revelation claims the title 'Jews' for the true people of God (2:9; 3:9), she sees the phylacteries equivalent to the seal on the followers of the Lamb. See Yarbrow Collins, 'The Political Perspective', 252. In my reading, I see the Jewish phylacteries vilified and made equivalent to the mark of the beast in an anti-Judaistic rhetoric. Some others suggested the mark to be coins bearing the emperor's image. Antoninus King Wai Siew, *The War between the Two Beasts and the Two Witnesses: A Chiastic Reading of Revelation 11.1-14.5* (LNTS 283; London: T&T Clark, 2005), 270, n. 168. But this reading does not account for the location of the mark on the forehead and hand.

<sup>408</sup> Yehudah B. Cohn, *Tangled up in Text: Tefillin and the Ancient World* (BJS 351; Providence, Rhode Island: Brown University, 2008), 11.

<sup>409</sup> Cohn, 107, 111-12.

<sup>410</sup> Cohn, 130. מצח = his forehead; פה יד = 'flat of his hand' or his palm. Joseph Rabinowitz (ed.), *Mishnah Megillah* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1931), 128-29.

<sup>411</sup> or 'above the highest point of the forehead in line directly between the eyes'; Cohn, 129.

<sup>412</sup> H. S. Horowitz and I. A. Rabin (eds.), *Mekhilta Derabbi Yishma'el* (Jerusalem: Bamberger and Wahrman, 1960), 66 line 20; 67, lines 11 and 14-18 (to Exod 13.9); Louis Finkelstein, *Sifre Deuteronomy* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary 1969), 64, lines 1-17 (to Deut 6:8); also *T. Sanh.* 4.7; *M. Miqva'ot* 10.3-4; Josep., *J. A.* 4.213; for these references, cf. Cohn, 128.

<sup>413</sup> This could be a playful depiction of what heretics did in reality.

4.8 above that members of ‘the way of heresy’, probably the Christian Jews or other ‘heretical’ Jews, distinguished from the ‘outsiders’, presumably the (gentile) judaizers, were wearing the tefillin in the wrong way, rabbinically-speaking. Though we cannot define these deviant groups surely, we can at least know (assuming that the author’s depiction of the specific placement of the mark is intentional) that these wearing the phylacteries in the wrong manner depicted were not adherents of Rabbinic Judaism. These appear to be groups at the fringes of the Jewish community. Christian Jews and Christian judaizers could have been represented creatively in this unorthodox way of wearing the tefillin. The striking similarity between the positioning of the mark and that of the tefillin encourages one’s imagination to make an association between the two.

If this interpretation of the mark of the beast is right, then the author appears to vilify the Judaistic authority behind the mark. He satirizes the tefillin as the mark of the ‘beast’, whose ultimate authority comes from Satan (Rev 13:4). In the author’s depiction, it is the second beast who had forced people to receive the mark of the first beast (13:6). It seems here that the mark of the beast, besides being the ‘name’ (13:17-18) of a Roman emperor, is now associated with the Jewish Rabbinic authority. The social-historical reason for this connection between the two powers (imperial and Judaistic) is not immediately clear, but we can postulate the following interpretation. The ‘beast from the land’ is depicted as taking on two roles: the first occurs in relation to the worship of the beast’s image, such as in an imperial cult; the second in the role of a ‘false prophet’ that the ‘beast of the land’ is alternatively called (cf. 19:20). If the latter role involves Jewish customs, then the beast from the land called ironically a ‘false prophet’, is depicted as a ‘prophet’ advocating Judaism. The author depicts him forcing all to participate in the imperial cult and to ‘judaize’ or adopt Jewish customs (13:17). Shaye Cohen notes, ‘[O]n numerous occasions the Mishnah and Tosefta single out the tefillin, among a few other practices, as representative of an entire class of religious observance.’<sup>414</sup> The wearing of Jewish phylacteries could similarly have been employed in the imagery of Revelation to represent a range of judaizing behaviour.<sup>415</sup>

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<sup>414</sup> Shaye J. D. Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 107.

<sup>415</sup> Examples of other judaizing behaviour include circumcision, observance of Sabbath and food laws. Murray, 3.

The two powers centred in the one person of the ‘beast from the land’ and ‘false prophet’ (an imperial and Judaistic figure combined) does not seem too far-fetched a portrayal if we think that synagogues often had patrons who were politically powerful, and sometimes had an emperor as patron. The naming of the synagogue after Emperor Augustus could be an indication of this.<sup>416</sup> The Jews of Berenike (Cyrenaica) is attested to have honoured ‘a local Roman official named M. Tittius for executing his responsibilities in a manner “well disposed toward the Jews of our community”’.<sup>417</sup> Cohen writes:

Local dignitaries might benefit the Jews through gifts to the community. For example, Tation daughter of Straton son of Empedon from her own resources constructed the assembly hall and the enclosure of the synagogue in Phocaea, and thus she “bestowed a gift on the Jews.” Julia Severa, the highpriestess of the cult of the emperor in Acmonia in the first century C.E., built a synagogue for the Jews of her town.<sup>418</sup>

It is, thus, not totally unthinkable for the author of Revelation to depict the synagogal power in the same camp with imperial power. In any case, the polyvalence of images in Revelation<sup>419</sup> renders it possible for ‘the beast from the land’ to have more than one denotation. It is depicted as enforcing two evils.<sup>420</sup>

The ruling of not being able to do business without the mark of the beast (13:17) could then allude to the many prohibitions reflected in Rabbinic literature against Jews doing business with gentiles under various circumstances. Within the suggested framework of the mark of the beast representing the Jewish *halakha*, a non-Jew without the mark (one who is not halakhic observant) would find many cumbersome prohibitions in trying to trade with Jews. Gary Porton has gathered the prohibitions neatly in a study.<sup>421</sup> The study reflects no universal ban on Jews doing

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<sup>416</sup> *CII* 284, 301, 338, 368, 416, 496.

<sup>417</sup> Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness*, 146-47.

<sup>418</sup> Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness*, 146-47.

<sup>419</sup> We will see polyvalence in the harlot imagery (ch. 7).

<sup>420</sup> Water argues that the ‘beast from the land’ and the ‘beast from the sea’ represent Jewish political messianism in Palestine and Diaspora Judaism respectively. Cf. Rick van de Water, ‘Reconsidering the Beast from the Sea (Rev 13.1)’, *NTS* 46 (2000): 245-61. Though not all his propositions are convincing, he calls one to consider Judaistic authority in the imagery of the beasts, besides a Roman one.

<sup>421</sup> Gary G. Porton, ‘Forbidden Transactions: Prohibited Commerce with Gentiles in Earliest Rabbinism’, in Jacob Neusner and Ernest S. Frerichs (eds.), 187-218, see 317-35.

business with gentiles, but there were many prohibitions according to the kind of items to be transacted, the time of the transaction, and what a gentile had intended to do with a certain item. Despite these regulations, there appeared to be ‘regular interaction’ between Jews and gentiles in the marketplace.<sup>422</sup> The censure of any buying and selling without the mark (Rev 13:17) could be a literary device of exaggeration. In more general terms, economic loss was indeed an issue for a Christian who did not affiliate with the synagogue. Not only was it inconvenient to trade with Jews, such a Christian could not benefit from synagogues’ connections with prominent figures.<sup>423</sup> One notes that the two churches in the ‘letters’ of Revelation depicted as having some kind of tense relations with members of the synagogue both experienced poverty and/or affliction (2:9-10; 3:10).

The clearest divergence from historical circumstance is that one does not find the tefillin being decreed for ‘all, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave’ (πάντας, τοὺς μικροὺς καὶ τοὺς μεγάλους, καὶ τοὺς πλουσίους καὶ τοὺς πτωχοὺς, καὶ τοὺς ἐλευθέρους καὶ τοὺς δούλους) as in Rev 13:16. The tefillin were supposed to be worn only by free adult Jewish males<sup>424</sup> and children old enough to handle the tefillin. Women and slaves appeared not to be required to wear them.<sup>425</sup> There is evidence, instead, that the Jewish tax was to be paid by both men and women, the young and old, slaves and freedmen.<sup>426</sup> Could the author have married the imagery of the tefillin with the payment of the tax in his creative depiction? One is left but to speculate at this point. But in essence, what we see is a universalized pressure to receive the mark in the visionary depiction (13:16-17). If this mark of the beast on the forehead or hand indeed alludes to the tefillin, its universal depiction would resonate with widespread judaizing behaviour commented upon by ancient authors (ch. 4, §1.2.1, para. 2, and 1.2 below).

An alternative interpretation is that the mark on the forehead is a kind of tattoo that was performed in ancient days to signify religious identity, such as in the

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<sup>422</sup> Porton, 335.

<sup>423</sup> For powerful personalities drawn to the synagogue, see Murray, 15-21.

<sup>424</sup> Cohn, *The Beginnings of Jewishness*, 113.

<sup>425</sup> Cohn, *The Beginnings of Jewishness*, 120.

<sup>426</sup> *CPJ* 2:114.

Eastern Mediterranean,<sup>427</sup> to punish delinquent slaves,<sup>428</sup> criminals<sup>429</sup> and prisoners of war,<sup>430</sup> or for other purposes of social distinction.<sup>431</sup> Tattoos using needles could be worked on parts of the body, such as on the forehead, the hand, ankles, wrist or neck.<sup>432</sup> Branding/stamping using hot iron was also possible on human subjects, such as among the Babylonians, Pharaohs and Ptolemies. But Greeks and Romans mainly used this method on horses.<sup>433</sup> Whether the mark on the forehead or the hand in Revelation parodies the tefillin or refers to a tattoo or stamp (or both), it is clearly to distinguish the religious affiliations of those marked in one way or other. The name of God and Jesus on the foreheads of the 144 000 (14:1; cf. 22:4) stands in contrast to the mark of the beast's name on the foreheads or hands of beast-adherents (13:17). Nelson Kraybill suggests further that the mark could have been an impression on coins alluding to the imperial cult or official stamps that bear the imperial or cult emblem. These were part and parcel of the economy, without which one could not trade. But this does not explain the strategic placement of the mark on the forehead or hand.<sup>434</sup>

## 1.2. Widespread judaizing behaviour and adherence of Jewish customs

Widespread adherence of Jewish customs in the imperial world was observed by a number of ancient writers. To reiterate, Josephus wrote on judaizing behavior in general:<sup>435</sup>

[T]he masses have long since shown a keen desire to adopt our religious observances; and there is not one city, Greek or barbarian, nor a single nation, to which our custom of abstaining from work on the seventh day has not spread, and where the fasts and the lighting of lamps, and many of our prohibitions in the matter of food are not observed.

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<sup>427</sup> C. P. Jones, 'Stigma: Tattooing and Branding in Graeco-Roman Antiquity', *JRS* 77 (1987): 139-55, see 144.

<sup>428</sup> See Jones, 140, 147-48.

<sup>429</sup> See Jones, 148-49.

<sup>430</sup> Jones, 146, also 149-50.

<sup>431</sup> For example among the Thracians, tattooing/branding is a sign of social status. See Jones, 151.

<sup>432</sup> Jones, 142-43.

<sup>433</sup> See Jones, 152-55.

<sup>434</sup> Kraybill, 136, 138-39.

<sup>435</sup> Joseph., *C. Ap.* 2.282-84 (Thackeray, LCL).

ἤδη πολὺς ζῆλος γέγονεν ἐκ μακροῦ τῆς ἡμετέρας εὐσεβείας, οὐδ' ἔστιν οὐ πόλις Ἑλλήνων οὐδ' ἡτισοῦν οὐδὲ βάρβαρος, οὐδὲ ἐν ἔθνος, ἐνθα μὴ τὸ τῆς ἐβδομάδος, ἣν ἀργοῦμεν ἡμεῖς, ἔθος διαπεφοίτηκεν, καὶ αἱ νηστεῖαι καὶ λύχνων ἀνακαύσεις καὶ πολλὰ τῶν εἰς βρῶσιν ἡμῖν οὐ νενομισμένων παρατετήρηται.

Judaizing behavior (of which donning the tefillin is a kind) must have been popular for various reasons among the gentiles in the imperial world.<sup>436</sup> The rhetoric of Josephus, wanting to put the Jewish law in a positive light, could have exaggerated the universal nature of the phenomenon. Judaizing behavior was also universalized by Seneca: ‘Meanwhile the customs of this accursed race have gained such influence that they are now received throughout all the world. The vanquished have given laws to their victors.’ (Cum interim usque eo sceleratissimae gentis consuetudo convaluit ut per omnes iam terras recepta sit; victi victoribus leges dederunt.)<sup>437</sup> Epictetus, reported by Arrian, expressed the duplicity of judaizing:<sup>438</sup>

[W]hy do you act the part of a Jew, when you are a Greek? Do you not see in what sense men are severally called Jew, Syrian, or Egyptian? For example, whenever we see a man halting between two faiths, we are in the habit of saying, “He is not a Jew, he is only acting the part.” But when he adopts the attitude of mind of the man who has been baptized and has made his choice, then he both is a Jew in fact and is also called one.

Τί ὑποκρίνη Ἰουδαῖον ὦν Ἕλλην; οὐχ ὁρᾷς, πῶς ἕκαστος λέγεται Ἰουδαῖος, πῶς Σύρος, πῶς Αἰγύπτιος; καὶ ὅταν τινὰ ἐπαμφοτερίζοντα ἴδωμεν, εἰώθαμεν λέγειν “οὐκ ἔστιν Ἰουδαῖος, ἀλλ' ὑποκρίνεται.” ὅταν δ' ἀναλάβῃ τὸ πάθος τὸ τοῦ βεβαμμένου καὶ ἡρημένου, τότε καὶ ἔστι τῷ ὄντι καὶ καλεῖται Ἰουδαῖος.

Such wavering between two ways must have been a common social phenomenon to catch the attention of a Stoic philosopher.

Judaizing behaviour or Jewish affiliation among Christians is also reflected by Christian authors, for example Ignatius, a second century author. Ignatius’ letter to the Magnesian Christians in Asia Minor expresses, ‘It is outlandish to proclaim Jesus Christ and practice Judaism. For Christianity did not believe in Judaism, but Judaism in Christianity...’ (ἄτοπόν ἐστιν, Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν λαλεῖν καὶ

<sup>436</sup> For gentile attraction to Judaism, see Murray, 11-28.

<sup>437</sup> Seneca, cited by August. *Civ.* 6.11 (Green et al., LCL).

<sup>438</sup> *Diatr.* 2.9.21 (Oldfather, LCL).



ἰουδαΐζειν. ὁ γὰρ Χριστιανισμὸς οὐκ εἰς Ἰουδαϊσμὸν ἐπίστευσεν, ἀλλ' Ἰουδαϊσμὸς εἰς Χριστιανισμόν...; 10.3).<sup>439</sup> It also appears that during Ignatius' time, some Christians not only judaized but also professed Judaism. Ignatius warned (10.1):<sup>440</sup>

For this reason, since we are his disciples, let us learn to live according to Christianity. For whoever is called by a name other than this does not belong to God.

διὰ τοῦτο, μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ γενόμενοι, μάθωμεν κατὰ Χριστιανισμόν ζῆν. ὅς γὰρ ἄλλῳ ὀνόματι καλεῖται πλεόν τούτου, οὐκ ἔστιν τοῦ θεοῦ.

He wrote in *Magn* 8.1, 'For if we have lived according to Judaism until now, we admit that we have not received God's gracious gift.' (εἰ γὰρ μέχρι νῦν κατὰ Ἰουδαϊσμὸν ζῶμεν, ὁμολογοῦμεν χάριν μὴ εἰληφέναι.)<sup>441</sup> This statement reflects the tendency of some Christians to follow Jewish customs. There were also some gentiles, it seems, trying to promote Judaism to Christians in Philadelphia:

But if anyone should interpret Judaism to you, do not hear him. For it is better to hear Christianity from a man who is circumcised than Judaism from one who is uncircumcised.<sup>442</sup>

Ἐὰν δέ τις Ἰουδαϊσμὸν ἐρμηνεύῃ ὑμῖν, μὴ ἀκούετε αὐτοῦ. ἄμεινον γάρ ἐστιν παρὰ ἀνδρὸς περιτομὴν ἔχοντος Χριστιανισμόν ἀκούειν, ἢ παρὰ ἀκροβύστου Ἰουδαϊσμόν.

In Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho* (set also in second century Asia Minor<sup>443</sup>), we see Christian Jews who persuaded gentile Christians to follow Mosaic institutions (see *Dial.* 47.3). Murray sees the fight against judaizing behavior as the reason for anti-Jewish rhetoric in the letters of Ignatius, the *Dialogue with Trypho* and Revelation. She writes:

Gentile Christian interest in Judaism angered the authors of these texts, prompting them to denigrate Jews and Judaism, a reaction that has contributed significantly to anti-Jewish attitudes among members of the early Christian Church....Each of these authors was responding

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<sup>439</sup> Ehrman, LCL

<sup>440</sup> Ehrman, LCL.

<sup>441</sup> Ehrman, LCL. Or '...have not received grace.'

<sup>442</sup> Ehrman, LCL.

<sup>443</sup> For dating, see Timothy J. Horner, "Listening to Trypho": Justin Martyr's *Dialogue Reconsidered* (CBET 28; Leuven: Peeters, 2001), 7.

to the existence of Christian judaizing within his respective community.<sup>444</sup>

### 1.3. Imperial cult and 'judaizing' pressures in the Rev 13:1-17

If we accept that bearing the mark of the beast in the way described (13:9) refers to the wearing of *tefillin* by outsiders to Rabbinic Judaism, Christians who adhere to Jewish customs, whether Jews or judaizers would fall within this category. Even if one does not detect any allusion of the mark to the *tefillin*, there was still a judaizing tendency among Christians in the imperial world. This section will try to make sense of the dual prohibition emphasized in Rev 14:9-12 in this light.

9 Καὶ ἄλλος ἄγγελος τρίτος ἠκολούθησεν αὐτοῖς λέγων ἐν φωνῇ μεγάλῃ, **Εἴ τις προσκυνεῖ τὸ θηρίον καὶ τὴν εἰκόνα αὐτοῦ, καὶ λαμβάνει χάραγμα ἐπὶ τοῦ μετώπου αὐτοῦ ἢ ἐπὶ τὴν χεῖρα αὐτοῦ,** 10 καὶ αὐτὸς πίεται ἐκ τοῦ οἴνου τοῦ θυμοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ κεκρασμένου ἀκράτου ἐν τῷ ποτηρίῳ τῆς ὀργῆς αὐτοῦ, καὶ βασανισθήσεται ἐν πυρὶ καὶ θείῳ ἐνώπιον ἀγγέλων ἁγίων καὶ ἐνώπιον τοῦ ἀρνίου. 11 καὶ ὁ καπνὸς τοῦ βασανισμοῦ αὐτῶν εἰς αἰῶνας αἰώνων ἀναβαίνει, καὶ οὐκ ἔχουσιν ἀνάπαυσιν ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτός, οἱ προσκυνοῦντες τὸ θηρίον καὶ τὴν εἰκόνα αὐτοῦ, καὶ εἴ τις λαμβάνει τὸ χάραγμα τοῦ ὀνόματος αὐτοῦ. 12 **Ὡδε ἡ ὑπομονὴ τῶν ἁγίων ἐστίν,** οἱ τηροῦντες τὰς ἐντολὰς τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν πίστιν Ἰησοῦ.<sup>445</sup>

This text consists of a series of three important proclamations by angels flying in midair to those who live on earth (14:6-13). It represents a major didactic concern of the author for its readers (the churches of Asia Minor). In Rev 14:9-12, the third proclamation, we see the dual prohibition stated *twice* against (1) worshipping the beast and his image; and (2) receiving the mark on the forehead or on the hand (vv. 9 and 11). This reflects a strong caution by the author. We also see that the highest level of punishment, eternal hell fire, is reserved for its offenders (vv. 9-10). The intensity of God's wrath on transgressors of either or both the offences is emphasized (vv. 9-10).

Now, the two offences fit well with the scenario posited in Chapter Four on the two alternatives Christians have in face of the pressure from the imperial cult: (1) to participate in imperial worship, or (2) feign affiliation with the synagogue by

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<sup>444</sup> Murray, 99.

<sup>445</sup> Emphasis mine.

judaizing to take cover in it.<sup>446</sup> In this way, we can also understand what the constant call for patient endurance (ὑπομονή) in verse 12 is about: to be stripped of the ‘protection’ of Judaism and to ‘defy’ the imperial cult, leaving a Christian very vulnerable to threats of accusation. Unlike adherents of Judaism, Christians were not able to draw support from an ancestral religion for their monotheistic practice. The threat, we saw, was especially severe under the spate of calumnies during the last years of Domitian’s rule.

Under the pressure of the imperial cult, Christian Jews would normally find it beneficial to enjoy the cover of Judaism through the practice of Jewish religious customs (acting like a Jew/proselyte).<sup>447</sup> In this way, their monotheistic belief system could be recognised as valid by members of the public. Though a monotheistic faith was not welcomed by polytheistic others in the society, the Jewish tradition was recognised generally under the Roman system. Julius Caesar had allowed *collegia* of Judaism (sometime between 49-44 B.C.E.) to continue operation when all non-ancient *collegia* in the whole empire were prohibited, since Judaism conformed with the criterion of an ancient religion. His edict, as recorded by Josephus, shows preferential treatment towards the Jews.

Now it displeases me that such statutes should be made against our friends and allies, and that they should be forbidden to live in accordance with their customs and to contribute money to common meals and sacred rites, for this they are not forbidden to do even in Rome.

ἐμοὶ τοίνυν οὐκ ἀρέσκει κατὰ τῶν ἡμετέρων φίλων καὶ συμμάχων τοιαῦτα γίνεσθαι ψηφίσματα, καὶ κωλύεσθαι αὐτοὺς ζῆν κατὰ τὰ αὐτῶν ἔθη καὶ χρήματα εἰς σύνδειπνα καὶ τὰ ἱερὰ εἰσφέρειν, τοῦτο ποιεῖν αὐτῶν μηδ’ ἐν Ῥώμῃ κεκωλυμένων.<sup>448</sup>

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<sup>446</sup> The author of Revelation presents ‘the worship of the beast’s statue’ and the ‘bearing of the mark’ as ‘both and’ in 14:9 and ‘either/or’ in 14:10. It does not mean that both acts were necessarily performed together. It is true that in Rev 13, the two acts are ‘enforced’ both by the ‘beast from the land’, and it seems that they are not ‘either-or’ alternatives, such as in our proposal for participation in imperial cult and judaizing behaviour. Nonetheless, it may be possible that the author is creatively depicting the ‘either-or’ situation as ‘both-and’. Rhetorically, this depicts the two as equally evil (succumbing to the beast) when some Christians could have thought that judaizing was a viable alternative and participation in the imperial cult was not.

<sup>447</sup> Wilson suggests similarly that ‘some Christians in Asia Minor were identifying themselves with the Jews in order to avoid official harassment’ because the Jews ‘had a more stable and established position in the Roman world’. Wilson, *Related Strangers*, 163.

<sup>448</sup> A.J. 14.214 (Page, LCL).

...I forbid other religious societies but permit these people [the Jews] alone to assemble and feast in accordance with their native customs and ordinances.

...καὶ γὰρ τοὺς ἄλλους θιάσους κωλύων, τούτοις μόνοις ἐπιτρέπω κατὰ τὰ πάτρια ἔθνη καὶ νόμιμα συνάγεσθαι τε καὶ ἐστιᾶσθαι.<sup>449</sup>

Following the footsteps of Julius Caesar, Augustus again exempted Jewish synagogues from the legal restrictions against *collegia*, and thus in a way gave the synagogues a ‘preferred status’.<sup>450</sup> Philo writes of Augustus’ generosity towards synagogues:<sup>451</sup>

[H]e did not expel them from Rome or deprive them of their Roman citizenship because they remembered their Jewish nationality also. He introduced no changes into their synagogues, he did not prevent them from meeting for the exposition of the Law, and he raised no objection to their offering of first fruits... Moreover...if the distribution [of money or food in Rome] happened to be made on the Sabbath...he instructed the distributors to reserve the Jews’ share of the universal largesse until the next day.

...οὔτε ἐξώκισε τῆς Ῥώμης ἐκείνους οὔτε τὴν Ῥωμαϊκὴν αὐτῶν ἀφείλετο πολιτείαν, ὅτι καὶ τῆς Ἰουδαϊκῆς ἐφρόντιζον, οὔτε ἐνεωτέρισεν εἰς τὰς προσευχὰς οὔτε ἐκώλυσε συνάγεσθαι πρὸς τὰς τῶν νόμων ὑφηγήσεις οὔτε ἠναντιώθη τοῖς ἀπαρχομένοις...

ἀλλ’ εἰ καὶ συνέβη τῆς ἱερᾶς ἐβδόμης ἐνεστῶσης γενέσθαι τὴν διανομήν,...προσετέτακτο τοῖς διανέμουσι ταμιεύειν τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις εἰς τὴν ὑστεραίαν τὴν κοινὴν φιλανθρωπίαν.

An exemption of Jews from a ban to assemble by Gaius is also noted by Josephus,<sup>452</sup>

Gaius Caesar, our consular praetor; by edict forbade religious societies to assemble in the city [i.e., Rome itself], but these people alone he did not forbid to do so or to collect contributions of money or to hold common meals.

...Γάιος Καῖσαρ ὁ ἡμέτερος στρατηγὸς ὑπάτος, ἐν τῷ διατάγματι κωλύων θιάσους συνάγεσθαι κατὰ πόλιν, μόνοις τούτους οὐκ ἐκώλυσεν οὔτε χρήματα συνεισφέρειν οὔτε συνδειπνᾶ ποιεῖν.

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<sup>449</sup> A.J. 14.216 (Page, LCL).

<sup>450</sup> Peter Richardson, ‘Early Synagogues as Collegia in the Diaspora and Palestine’, in John Kloppenborg, and Stephen G. Wilson (eds.), *Voluntary Associations in the Graeco-Roman World* (London: Routledge, 1996), 90-109, see 93.

<sup>451</sup> Philo, *Leg.* 157-58; Philonis Alexandrini, *Legatio ad Gaium* (E. Mary Smallwood, ed. and trans.; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1961), 92-94.

<sup>452</sup> A.J. 14.214-15 (Page, LCL).

Richardson writes, 'Judaism in diaspora was surprisingly protected by the actions of Julius Caesar, the Senate of Rome, and Augustus; this protection went beyond that of other *collegia*.' The 'protection' included the freedom to send the temple tax, larger voluntary gifts and the produce for tithing of first-fruits to Jerusalem while the temple in Jerusalem stood. They were also allowed to exercise their traditional customs. Other rights included 'exemption from military service, freedom to observe the Sabbath', and 'opportunity to adjudicate their own civil suits.'<sup>453</sup> Though occasionally Jewish *collegia*, like all *collegia*, could have been restrained by legislations of individual emperors,<sup>454</sup> Jewish *collegia* had the added benefit of appealing to their ancient tradition for legitimisation. This is something that Christian *collegia* could not do. Despite occasional tensions of Jewish communities with political authorities, the religious customs of the Jewish community were generally respected by emperors in the first century C.E. Conversely, Christian associations without Jewish affiliation

would no longer be viewed by the authorities as part of the Jewish *politeuma* of their city. They would be viewed as religious associations (*thiasoi*). These were founded for the worship of gods whose cults were not part of the religion of the city....The precarious situation of Christian *thiasoi* arose because, while most religious associations could claim to be continuing as ancient tradition linked to a particular family, city or ethnic group, and while such ancient traditions were respected, the only ancient traditions the Christians could claim were those of the Jews. If the local Jewish community disassociated itself from the Christians the cult would appear to be a new and probably deceptive superstition.<sup>455</sup>

Yarbro Collins has spoken well of the difficulty of Christian groups without affiliation to the Jewish community. The imperial cult permeated many aspects of the social life in Asia, and Christians were constantly faced with two alternatives: (1)

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<sup>453</sup> Richardson, 96. The Flavian victory in the Jewish war in 67-73 C.E. does not appear to have affected the legitimacy of Jews practicing their religion. In fact, the Jewish tax that Vespasian had instituted for the Jews after their defeat in 70 C.E. could have provided the legitimacy for Jews to continue in their Jewish custom and belief.

<sup>454</sup> E.g., Tiberius expelled Jews and adherents of Isis from Rome in 19 C.E. Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness*, 62. Claudius disbanded clubs reintroduced by Gaius in 41 C.E. Even though Jewish ones were also affected, Jews were still allowed to practice their religion but were simply forbidden to assemble. Cass. Dio, 60.6.6; cf. Wendy J. Cotter, 'The Collegia and Roman Law: State Restrictions on Voluntary Associations 64 BCE-200 CE', in John S. Kloppenborg and Stephen G. Wilson (eds.), *Voluntary Associations in the Greco-Roman World* (London: Routledge, 1996), 74-89, see 80.

<sup>455</sup> Yarbro Collins, 'Insiders and Outsiders', 198.

face the threat of being accused of not participating in the imperial cult, or (2) show/feign affiliation with the Judaistic faith as excuse for non-participation in the imperial cult.<sup>456</sup>

An example of the lure of Christians to affiliate with the synagogue could be found in the Decian persecution of Christians in 249-250 C.E. Such an affiliation would have been beneficial to the Christians who could not explain their monotheistic stance by any ancient tradition. Without a valid reason for non-compliance, Christians bore the brunt of the Decian decree for all inhabitants of the Roman Empire to sacrifice to the gods.<sup>457</sup> Besides drawing upon an ancient religious tradition as support, the synagogues could have as always other acceptable ways of honouring the emperor (more below). In the *Martyrdom of Pionius* set in the Decian persecution, on the one hand, Jews mock Christians who give in to pressure and offer sacrifices to the gods (4.2-14);<sup>458</sup> on the other, some Jews invite Christians to attend the synagogue meetings (*MPio* 13.1-2). In this context, Pionius exhorts Christians not to attend the synagogue. He writes:

I understand also that the Jews have been inviting some of you to their synagogues. Beware lest you fall into a greater, more deliberate sin, lest anyone commit the unforgivable sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Do not become with them rulers of Sodom and people of Gomorrha, whose hands are tainted with blood. We did not slay our prophets nor did we betray Christ and crucify him. But why need I say much to you?<sup>459</sup>

Ἀκούω δὲ ὅτι καὶ τινες ὑμῶν Ἰουδαῖοι καλοῦσιν εἰς συναγωγάς. διὸ προσέχετε μὴ ποτε ὑμῶν καὶ μείζον καὶ ἐκούσιον ἁμάρτημα ᾗσῃται, μηδὲ τις τὴν ἀναφαίρετον ἁμαρτίαν τὴν εἰς τὴν βλασφημίαν τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος ἁμαρτήσῃ. μὴ γίνεσθε ἅμα αὐτοῖς ἄρχοντες Σοδόμων καὶ λαὸς Γομόρρας, ὧν αἱ χεῖρες αἵματος πλήρεις. ἡμεῖς δὲ οὔτε προφήτας ἀπεκτείναμεν οὐδὲ τὸν Χριστὸν παρεδώκαμεν καὶ ἐσταυρώσαμεν. καὶ τί πολλὰ λέγω ὑμῖν;

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<sup>456</sup> Wilson, *Related Strangers*, 163; cf. Murray, 81; also Stephen G. Wilson, *Leaving the Fold: Apostates and Defectors in Antiquity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 73.

<sup>457</sup> See J. B. Rives, 'The Decree of Decius and the Religion of Empire', *JRS* 89 (1999): 135-54.

<sup>458</sup> Paul R. Trebilco, *Jewish Communities in Asia Minor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 30.

<sup>459</sup> *MPio* 13.1-3; H. Musurillo (ed.), *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs* (Oxford: Oxford Clarendon, 1972), 137-167, see 152-53.

The author warns Christians not to fall into a ‘greater and more deliberate sin’ (μεῖζον καὶ ἐκούσιον ἁμάρτημα) of blasphemy of the Holy Spirit by associating with the synagogue. This ‘greater sin’ in its literary context refers to learning the ways of the synagogue, which the author associates with Sodom, Gomorrah and the murderers of Jesus. It is not told, though, how Christians responded to the invitation. Nonetheless, we can tell from the author’s strong words of warning that quite a number of Christians could have attended synagogue meetings. Though the text does not state what attending the synagogue entails, nor the motivation behind the action, the synagogal invitation (*MPio* 13) is juxtaposed for the author’s rhetorical purpose with examples of faithful endurance in the spate of official pressure to sacrifice (*MPio* 2-12). The faithful ones would rather die than to seek respite for themselves, even under the persuasion of fellow Christians who had apostatized. The author of the martyrdom account could be concerned about those who sought respite with the synagogue under threat. Along the same line, Leigh Gibson conjectures whether

- (1) ‘some Christians have begun visiting synagogues in the midst of Roman persecution, motivated, at least initially, to escape death’; or if
- (2) the rhetoric in *MPio* is to show that judaizing is a cowardly behaviour, and
- (3) ‘synagogue-visiting Christians have been so persistent in their practices that their opponents were forced to place their objections onto the lips of their revered forebear, Pionius’.<sup>460</sup>

One can never be sure of the motive of the synagogue-goers without the text stating it explicitly, but one is invited based on the rebuke against synagogue attendance set in the context of martyrdom and apostasy to speculate along these lines.

Though the circumstances of the Decian persecution and the crisis in Revelation were not altogether similar, one can imagine the lure of the socially more established synagogue during the heat of the Flavian cult in Asia Minor. As suggested, judaizing behaviour or adherence to Jewish customs could suggest to members of the public such an affinity. They could have been fooled by such a judaizing act, since in the pre-Rabbinic period prior to second century C.E.,

conversion to Judaism was entirely a private affair. Conversions were not supervised or overseen by anyone, and there was no conversion

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<sup>460</sup> E. Leigh Gibson, ‘Jewish Antagonism of Christian Polemic: The Case of the Martyrdom of Pionius’, *J ECS* 9 (2001): 339-58, see 358

ceremony. Circumcisions could be performed by anyone in any manner....Any gentile who followed (or pretended to follow) Jewish practices could claim to be a convert.<sup>461</sup>

A wealthy synagogue had the means to honour the emperor other than by sacrificing to the emperor or participating in the imperial cult. Expensive dedications, such as gilded shields, gilded crowns, pillars and inscriptions (Philo, *Leg.* 133) in honour of the emperor, could also be a way to show loyalty.<sup>462</sup> There was an added indication of loyalty before the first Jewish revolt: sacrifices were made twice daily in the Jerusalem temple for the emperor and the roman people, and special sacrifices were made at the accession of the emperor (Philo, *Leg.* 356; Joseph. *B.J.* 2.197),<sup>463</sup> in addition to other acts of loyalty (see *Leg.* 280). But after the temple was razed, a show of piety and loyalty to the emperor continued in various ways. Josephus refers to the many honours bestowed to the emperor, including dedicatory ornaments, inscriptions, and oaths of allegiance (Joseph. *A.J.* 18.124). James Hardin writes, 'Epigraphic evidence even tells of a synagogue community in Rome dedicated to Emperor Augustus. Indeed, it was not exceptional for Jews to be conspicuous in their honour of the emperor.'<sup>464</sup>

All these measures served to substitute the loyalty and piety exhibited through participation in the imperial cult. The occasional tensions with imperial authorities were pacified with the help of powerful Jews who were friends of the emperors or who had connections in high places, such as Philo, Agrippa the elder and younger, and Josephus, who could speak for the Jewish cause if they wished.<sup>465</sup> The Jewish community has its own way of negotiating its way around the imperial

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<sup>461</sup> Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness*, 223.

<sup>462</sup> Different Jews had different ideas of what constituted acceptable behaviour of honouring the emperor, but there were hellenistic Jews who were very adept at accommodating the imperial cult in the way they deemed to be acceptable. See discussion, see Helen K. Bond, 'Standards, Shields and Coins: Jewish Reactions to Aspects of the Roman Cult in the Time of Pilate', in Stephen C. Barton, *Idolatry: False Worship in the Bible, Early Judaism and Christianity* (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 88-106.

<sup>463</sup> Steven Weitzman, *Surviving Sacrilege: Cultural Persistence in Jewish Antiquity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005), 60; James S. McLaren, 'Jews and the Imperial Cult: From Augustus to Domitian', *JSNT* 27 (2005): 257-78, see 271.

<sup>464</sup> Justin K. Hardin, *Galatians and the Imperial Cult: A Critical Analysis of the First-Century Social Context of Paul's Letter* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 108.

<sup>465</sup> For Philo and Agrippa I as friends of the emperor, see Weitzman, 55-78. Josephus defected to the Flavians during the first Jewish revolt, and yet writes for the Jewish cause (e.g., *B J* 4.182-4).



cult. A Christian who is connected with an established or wealthy synagogue would be made less susceptible to accusations by other members of the public.

## ***2. A Context for the Polemic against the So-Called 'Jews' (Rev 2:9-10; 3:9)***

For a while, I used some contextual factors under Domitian's rule as background to the crisis depicted Rev 13:11-18 of the 'visions'. It is posited that this context acts as part of the picture of the author's didactic aims for the churches of Asia Minor. I will now depart from this context as I turn to the rhetoric in the 'letters'. The reason is that a discrepancy is detected between the severe mood of suffering in the 'vision section' and the isolated incidents of trouble in some churches in Asia Minor. We do not actually detect in the letters a situation that can amount to a critical scenario in the 'visions' (such as in 13:11-18). We see only some threats posed by the so-called 'Jews' to the church in Smyrna, and some tension between Christians of Philadelphia and the Jews. But no threatening circumstance is described (2:9-10 and 3:9). We also see some form of hardships posed by 'false apostles' in the church of Ephesus (2:2-3). There is, albeit, martyrdom in Pergamum, but it appears to be a past event ('in the days of Antipas', 2:13). Christians in the church of Laodicea appear to have grown complacent because of their wealth and comfortable living (3:14-17). This is naturally so, if Laodicean Christians had no scruples with getting involved in pagan/imperial cults, nor with forming alliance with the synagogue. Generally speaking, one senses that the seven letters to the churches do not reflect an unsettled circumstance during Domitian's time of rampant accusations resulting in death, confiscation of property or banishment implicating Christians. They, rather, reflect an ordinary time when scrupulous Christians still struggled with social pressures to conform and the lure to apostatize.

Though the crisis in Rev 13:11-17 can reflect the crisis in late Domitian's reign, I surmise that the crisis during Domitian's reign was already abating when the Apocalypse reached its addressees in the Asian churches, probably after Domitian's death, since the 'letters' do not reflect a time of crisis, just the occasional social pressure from the synagogue and society at the present (2:9). There are, though, pressures in the past and to come (2:3, 10; 3:10). The 'visions' could have reflected in part critical moments in a recent past for the didactic purpose of encouraging Christians to endure on-going and future threats. Pagan cults and imperial cults were

still prevalent under normal circumstances, and the temptation to syncretistic participation would have remained.

Some proposals were made to explain the lack of indication of a full-blown crisis in the 'letters'. R. H. Charles pre-dates the 'letters' to Vespasian's time, while Aune postdates the 'letters' to the rest of the book in the time of Trajan.<sup>466</sup> I would think that the whole work was composed together and not redacted over an extended period because of the well-integrated nature of all its parts, the imminent nature of what is to happen (3:11; 11:14; 22:6-7; 22:12, 20), as well as the need to convey what is seen urgently to its readers (22:10). Victorinus of Pettau suggests that the book of Revelation was delivered to the churches after John had returned from exile in the time of Nerva (ch. 1, §3.1). This detail would fit the discrepancy highlighted between the 'letters' (chs. 2-3) and 'visions' (chs. 4-22). By this time, the crisis facing Christians would have been in the process of abating. Nerva had curtailed/suppressed the serious situation of calumny during Domitian's time and had restored those wrongly exiled. (Euseb., *Hist. Eccl.* 3.20.10). The context of the churches could have reverted back to an ordinary level of pressure. Christians would have been less prone to malicious accusations by then. Sure there were still some threats for Christians who refused to participate in the imperial cult, and we would still expect to see the occasional threat of blasphemy/slander, such as from some opposing members of the synagogue.

It is interesting, though, that despite the lower level of threat in normal circumstances, there remains a strong polemic against the Jews who blaspheme/slander. These were denied their Jewish heritage and labelled members of the 'synagogue of Satan' (συναγωγή τοῦ σατανᾶ). Leaving the polemic against 'Jezebel' for a later point, we notice an anti-Judaistic slant in the rhetoric in letters against the synagogue. Aune writes,

While there is some information in Rev 2-3 about the persecution of Christians in Asia Minor, it is striking that the persecutors mentioned are neither pagans nor representative of the Roman government, but Jews (2:9-10; cf. 3:9).

Although the (imperial) 'throne' (θρόνος) of Satan (2:13) is mentioned and 'Satan' (Σατανᾶς) is used in 2:13 in a matter-of-fact way as a code for imperial authority,

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<sup>466</sup> R. H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920), xciv-xcv; Aune, *Revelation* 1-5, lxv.

there is no direct anti-imperial polemic in the ‘letters’ as in the ‘visions’ caricaturing the emperors as beasts. I will suggest that this polemical slant in the ‘letters’ against the synagogue relates to one aspect of the dual-prohibition expressed in Rev 14:9-12: an objection to Christian ‘judaizing’ behaviour or affiliation with the synagogue as a bid to avoid the pressure of the imperial cult. Both the worship of the beast and the bearing of its mark (understood as a judaizing act) in the ‘visions’ have been identified as a very important concern of the author (§1.3, para. 1). Such an important concern would naturally surface in his exhortation to the readers in the ‘letters’, given the unity of the work.<sup>467</sup>

## 2.1. The βλασφηημία of the so-called ‘Jews’ (Rev 2:9)

We see some who claim to be Jews causing harm to Christians in Smyrna through their βλασφημία (2:9-10). The term βλασφημία means basically ‘to abuse, insult’.<sup>468</sup> It could refer to speaking abusively against God, man or things.<sup>469</sup> In the absence of a stated object for the act of βλασφημία, one has to leave the two options open. We can understand the use of βλασφημία as either directed against Jesus (since Jews do not normally blaspheme God) or against Christians. It is not hard to imagine that blasphemous (insulting) words could develop into assault and harm.<sup>470</sup> In Acts 13:45, the abusive language of the Jews against Paul, his message or against Jesus (direct object of βλασφημέω is not specified) led to harmful consequences for Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:50). It is not clear if the ‘high standing god-fearing women’ (τὰς σεβομένας γυναῖκας τὰς εὐσχήμονας) and ‘the leading men of the city’ (τοὺς πρῶτους τῆς πόλεως καὶ ἐπὶ χειρὶν) incited by the blasphemous/slandering Jews had political power, or if the subsequent expulsion was

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<sup>467</sup> One can give many examples of how the whole book ties together as one. One such indication is the framing of its contents with corresponding elements in ch.1 and 22:7-21. Common references include: the ‘prophecy’ (προφητεία) of the book (1:3; cf. 22:7, 18); the ‘testimony’ (μαρτυρία) of Jesus (1:2; cf. 22:16); the addressees, the churches (1:11; cf. 22:16); blessings for the obedient (1:3; cf. 22:7); the immediacy of the events (1:3; cf. 22:10); the coming of Jesus Christ (1:7; cf. 22:12), his title as ‘the Alpha and the Omega’ (τὸ ἄλφα καὶ τὸ ὦ; 1:8; cf. 22:13); and John worshipping Jesus and mistakenly an angel (1:17; cf. 22:8).

<sup>468</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave: A Commentary on the Passion Narratives in the Four Gospels* (ABRL; New York: Double Day, 1994), 522.

<sup>469</sup> For details, see Brown, 522.

<sup>470</sup> See Osborne, 131.

official or a mob action.<sup>471</sup> But these people stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas. In the case of Revelation, imprisonment was predicted as a consequence to the blasphemy/slander. Most scholars understand the ‘blasphemy’ (βλασφημία) to mean ‘slander’ directed against the Christians instead of ‘blasphemy’ towards God in Rev 2:9-10.<sup>472</sup> Such slander could have reminded the readers of the slanderous accusations during Domitian’s time.

One detects a clear polemic against ‘the ones who claim to be Jews’ in the churches of Smyrna and Philadelphia (Rev 2:9-10; 3:9). The author calls these ‘Jews’ (Ἰουδαῖος) in both locations members of the ‘synagogue of Satan’ (συναγωγή τοῦ σατανᾶ). It may be that the author was referring to two local groups of Jews at odds with the Christian community of their city, and aligned them and their synagogues with Satan. It may also be that these Jews were part of a larger association across cities that created some pressure for certain churches. Whatever the case, the naming of the synagogue after ‘Satan’ in both Smyrna and Philadelphia, shows that the rhetoric was not aimed at just one synagogue but was generalizing synagogues as Satanic (12:9).

There is a close contextual relation in Rev 2:9-10 between the slander and the subsequent imprisonment of some Christians.<sup>473</sup> A close look at the arrangement of the textual context shows this.

9 Οἶδά σου τὴν θλίψιν καὶ τὴν πτωχείαν, ἀλλὰ πλούσιος εἶ, καὶ τὴν βλασφημίαν ἐκ τῶν λεγόντων Ἰουδαίους εἶναι ἑαυτούς, καὶ οὐκ εἰσὶν ἀλλὰ συναγωγή τοῦ Σατανᾶ. 10 μηδὲν φοβοῦ ἃ μέλλεις πάσχειν. ἰδοὺ μέλλει βάλλειν ὁ διάβολος ἐξ ὑμῶν εἰς φυλακὴν ἵνα πειρασθῆτε, καὶ ἔξετε θλίψιν ἡμερῶν δέκα. γίνου πιστὸς ἄχρι θανάτου, καὶ δώσω σοι τὸν στέφανον τῆς ζωῆς.

<sup>471</sup> See J. S. M. Taylor, ‘St Paul and the Roman Empire: Acts of the Apostle 13-14’, *ANRW* II, 26.2 (1995): 1189-1231, see 1211.

<sup>472</sup> Aune, *Revelation* 1-5, 162; Adela Yarbro Collins, ‘Vilification and Self Definition in the Book of Revelation’, *HTR* 79 (1986): 308-20, see 313; Cohen, ‘Crossing the Boundary’, *HTR* 82 (1989): 13-33, see 26.

<sup>473</sup> The juxtaposition of the slander of some Jews and the imprisonment of some Christians lead one to connect the two together. Yarbro Collins says,

[T]he “synagogue of Satan” are instigators of legal action against the persons whom John is addressing. Their blasphemy or slander then would be the charge of accusation which they made to initiate legal proceedings.

Yarbro Collins, ‘Vilification and Self Definition’, 312-13. Aune sees ‘active participation’ of the Jews in landing Christians in prison. Aune, *Revelation* 1-5, 163. One cannot know for sure, but the text is suggestive of this.

Even though the relation between the βλασφημία of the Jews and the subsequent imprisonment by the devil (or Satan) is not certain, rhetorically, the text leads the reader to connect the two by incorporating them in a textual unit, Rev 2:9-10. The ‘affliction’ (θλίψις) at the beginning of verse 9 is echoed in verse 10. It is thus likely that the imprisonment in verse 10 is meant to relate to the βλασφημία by the so-called ‘Jews’ in verse 9. This devil/Satan/dragon (cf. 12:9; 20:2), together with the beasts, is not uncommonly interpreted as imperial authority.<sup>474</sup> Furthermore, the ‘throne’ of Satan (which suggests imperial authority)<sup>475</sup> is associated textually with the death of the Christian Antipas in Pergamum sometime ago. Antipas’ death is portrayed in relation to the doings of ‘Satan’. (See the *inclusio* and emphasis using word ‘Satan’ in 2:13.) In both Pergamum and Smyrna, some Christians are depicted as facing trouble from the civic/imperial authorities, and at least in Smyrna, blasphemous/slandering Jews were rendered as indirectly involved.

## 2.2. The identity of the so-called ‘Jews’ (Rev 2:9-10 and 3:9)

It is likely that those who claim to be Jews mentioned in Rev 2:9 and 3:9 are one and the same group. But who were these claiming to be Jews, yet denied of Jewish identity? According to Cohen’s study, “Ιουδαῖος” was originally an ‘ethnic-geographic’ term referring to the inhabitants of Judaea, but the term became a wider designation from the second half of the second century B.C.E. to include (1) those who came to be adherents of the God of the Judeans and his precepts, and (2) those who become citizens or allies of Judaea.<sup>476</sup> Since our context is in Asia Minor and not in Judaea, we focus on the first category consisting of Jews and proselytes within Judaism.

Were the so-called ‘Jews’ ethnic Jews denied of their identity? The author could have redefined ‘true Jews’ to mean, spiritually, the believers of Jesus.<sup>477</sup> The

<sup>474</sup> The Satanic trio is reflective of the Flavian dynasty (ch. 3).

<sup>475</sup> Scholars generally do not dispute that the Satan’s throne (2:13) represents imperial power. See Leigh Gibson, 357; Adela Yarbro Collins, ‘The Revelation of John: An Apocalyptic Response to a Social Crisis’, *CurTM* 8 (2004): 4-12, see 7.

<sup>476</sup> Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness*, 70-71, 104-5.

<sup>477</sup> Trebilco adopts the idea presented here that these Jews were not fit to be called ‘Jews’ because of their rejection of Jesus. See Trebilco, 27. Similarly, Philip L. Mayo, “*Those Who Call Themselves Jews*”: *The Church and Judaism in the Apocalypse of John* (PTMS 60; Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 58-62. The majority of scholars interpret the so-called Jews as ‘the local Jewish community whose right to the name *Ioudaios* is challenged by John’. Yarbro Collins, ‘Insiders and Outsiders’, 205.

apostle Paul redefined ‘Jew’ spiritually as one who is circumcised of the heart by the Holy Spirit, not according to the Torah (Rom 2:29). Such a redefinition is possibly seen in the context of the letter to the Philadelphian church (Rev 3:7-13). The author calls those who lay claim to the Jewish identity as ‘lying’ or ‘being false’ (ψεύδομαι) about their identity and labels them the ‘synagogue of Satan’ (συναγωγή τοῦ σατανᾶ, 3:9). An intertextual reading with Isa 22:22 (LXX) clearly alluded to in Rev 3:7 may cast light on the nature of the polemic. In Rev 3:7, Jesus is described as the one ‘who holds the key of David’ and ‘what he shuts no one can open’. He is cast in the ‘type’ of Eliakim son of Hilkiah, who has a secure throne over the house of David (see Isa 22:23-24). Eliakim bears certain similarity to Jesus. In Isa 22:22 (LXX), God is said to give Eliakim the

key of the house of David upon his shoulder; and he shall open, and there shall be none to shut; and he shall shut, and there shall be none to open.

δώσω αὐτῷ τὴν κλεῖδα οἴκου Δαβὶδ ἐπὶ τῷ ὤμῳ αὐτοῦ· καὶ ἀνοίξει, καὶ οὐκ ἔσται ὁ ἀποκλείων.<sup>478</sup>

Furthermore, Eliakim is supposed to replace an earlier incumbent, Shebna, who is to be removed from his position (Isa 22:23-25). Would this correspondence of Jesus to Eliakim be used to describe the replacement of a new chosen leader over the old one? The community of the new leader then becomes the chosen community. This seems likely. We see the ‘new’ Jerusalem introduced in the same letter (3:12). The new is to replace the old, the earthly one, which has been trampled by gentiles in the first Jewish war (Rev 9 and 11:1-2; see ch. 2, §2.1). Significantly, the descent of the ‘new’ Jerusalem is set at the climax of Revelation (21:2). John comments that he does not see a temple in this new Jerusalem (21:22), but God and Jesus are the temple. The seat of religious power is now transferred to Jesus and God (who are the temple, 21:22), and Jesus is presented as on a par with God—a blasphemous depiction from the perspective of Judaism! Furthermore, the author plays with the idea of an elect, the 144 000, chosen out of the twelve tribes of Israel (Rev 7:3-8). We see the redefinition of who constitutes the chosen ones of God. In this community, Jesus again holds a crucial position. The 144 000 are marked with Father’s name (i.e., God’s name) and the name of Jesus, and they stand on Mount

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<sup>478</sup> Lancelot C. L. Brenton, *The Septuagint with Apocrypha: Greek and English* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2007), 856.

Zion, representing the new/heavenly Jerusalem (Rev 14:1; cf. Heb 12.22). In Rev 3:12, the three elements, the name of God, the new name of Jesus and the new Jerusalem are associated with the adherents of Jesus' commands. One could interpret the author's denial of the so-called 'Jews' their Jewish identity in this light of the redefinition of what constitutes the people of God. The author calls the blasphemous/slandering Jews sarcastically a synagogue of 'Satan'. Not only are they deposed of their honourable position as 'Jews', they are put in the camp of God's main adversary.

Having said this, one still asks whether the so-called 'Jews' could be judaizers, and thus 'non-Jews' in an ethnic sense. A few scholars take this position, contrary to the more common interpretation above that these were ethnic Jews.<sup>479</sup> Michele Murray relates the interpretation of 'the ones who claim to be Jews but are not' to Epictetus' description (*Diatr.* 2.9.21) of those only 'acting the part' (ὑποκρίνεται), who did not undergo conversion to Judaism.<sup>480</sup> Judaizers who acted like Jews seem to be common in the society from Epictetus' saying. This identification of the so-called 'Jews' as those who acted the part of Jews without conversion is inviting. Cohen, differently from Murray, holds that the so-called 'Jews' were ethnic Jews. But he also notices a possible reference in the label 'those who claim to be Jews and are not' to the popular notion of 'gentiles who "act the part of Jews" but are not in fact Jews'. He, however, sees the author ironically applying the common notion of 'judaizers' on Jews themselves.<sup>481</sup>

One major difficulty for reading the so-called 'Jews' as judaizers would be how such Christians could be blaspheming Christ or slandering other Christians (cf. 2:9-10).<sup>482</sup> Furthermore, there are indications in the text that 'the ones claiming to be Jews' in 2:9 and 3:9 cannot be *mainly* gentile judaizers, even if there were some in the group. We see in 2:9, the two nominal phrases 'the ones who claim to be Jews' and the 'synagogue of Satan' are meant to equate to each other. In 3:9, the two nominal phrases stand in apposition to each other.

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<sup>479</sup> E.g., Murray, 76-80. For others taking similar positions, see Mayo, 56-57.

<sup>480</sup> Murray, 77-78.

<sup>481</sup> Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness*, 27.

<sup>482</sup> Mayo, 58.

Οἶδά...τὴν βλασφημίαν ἐκ τῶν λεγόντων Ἰουδαίους εἶναι  
ἐαυτούς, καὶ οὐκ εἰσὶν ἀλλὰ συναγωγὴ τοῦ Σατανᾶ. (2:9)

ἰδοὺ διδῶ ἐκ τῆς συναγωγῆς τοῦ Σατανᾶ, τῶν λεγόντων  
ἐαυτούς Ἰουδαίους εἶναι, καὶ οὐκ εἰσὶν ἀλλὰ ψεύδονται· (3:9)

This means that ‘the ones who claim to be Jews’ are equivalent to a ‘synagogue’. Assuming that the ‘synagogue’ is meant in a literal sense to be a Jewish association (and there is no reason not to think so), it seems very unlikely that a synagogue could have consisted entirely of judaizers, even though judaizers might have tagged along at the fringes of the community. It follows, then, from the above analysis that ‘those who claim to be Jews’ were *mainly ethnic Jews belonging to the synagogue* and were denied their identity as true Jews, because they did not profess Jesus.<sup>483</sup> Some Christian judaizers might have been tagging along with this Jewish group, and are likewise criticised for their association with it.

Repentance is predicted to happen to some of the Jews. Jesus will make them come and fall at the feet of the Christians in Philadelphia and make them realize that he had loved the Christians (3:9). Some see the ‘open door’ (θύρα ἡνεωγμένη) in the context of evangelism, but evangelism is not seen as taking place in the context of the ‘letter’.<sup>484</sup> From the Pauline letters, an ‘open door’ can refer to ‘an opportunity for successful ministry’ (1 Cor 16:9, 2 Cor 2:12 and Col 4:3). The text in Revelation provides an explanation for the ‘open door’ (3:8-9).

8 ...ἰδοὺ δέδωκα ἐνώπιόν σου θύραν ἡνεωγμένην...

9 ἰδοὺ διδῶ [σε<sup>485</sup>] ἐκ τῆς συναγωγῆς τοῦ Σατανᾶ...

ἰδοὺ ποιήσω αὐτούς ἵνα ἤξουσιν καὶ προσκυνήσουσιν  
ἐνώπιον τῶν ποδῶν σου, καὶ γνῶσιν ὅτι ἐγὼ ἡγάπησά σε.

Verbal forms of δίδωμι occur in both 3:8 and 3:9. The indirect object of δέδωκα in 3:8 is the ‘open door’, while the indirect object of the διδῶ in 3:9a are ‘some of’ (partitive use of ἐκ) those in ‘the synagogue of Satan’. This sentence in 3:9a beginning with διδῶ breaks off suddenly, and the meaning is resumed in the second part of the verse headed by ἰδοὺ. In fact, the three lines begin with ἰδοὺ for emphasis to alert the reader to make connections between them. The partitive ἐκ in 3:9

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<sup>483</sup> For various reasons for adopting this, see Mayo, 51-62. I state the main reasons that lead me to the conclusion.

<sup>484</sup> Cf. Aune, *Revelation* 1-5, 236; Osborne, 188.

<sup>485</sup> Personal pronoun is carried over from 3:8.



indicates that Jesus does not make the whole synagogue repent of their attitude against the Christians. Only some of them will acknowledge that their enmity towards the Philadelphian Christians is wrongly directed.

### 2.3. Bad-naming the synagogue after ‘Satan’

The author attributes the Jewish blasphemers/slanderers to the synagogue of ‘Satan’. Satan is a relentless ‘accuser’ (κατήγορ) of Christians in Revelation’s rhetoric (12:10-11). This attribute of ‘Satan’ actually resonates with the situation of calumny during the last few years of Domitian’s reign. The Roman legal system was basically ‘accusatorial’.<sup>486</sup> The legal system

relied upon an accuser who laid the charge and presented the case, rather than on official investigation. Consequently, for a Christian to be charged before a provincial governor meant that he or she would have been denounced and prosecuted by neighbours, family or friends.<sup>487</sup>

It was deduced in Chapter Four that Christians formed a substantial part of those maligned during that time. In Rev 2:9-10, some Jews of Smyrna were using abusive language to harm Christians. These were relegated to Satan’s camp. The accusations by Satan in heaven before God (12:10) is portrayed as the spiritual reality behind the accusations from members of the synagogue. The abusive language of the Jews in 2:9-10 in some way had brought about the attention of civic/imperial authorities. Correspondingly, Satan/dragon (12:9, 13) takes on the connotation of imperial power in Revelation’s symbolism. The naming of the synagogue after Satan could be illustrative of the close relation between the synagogue and the imperial authorities. Synagogues were named after an emperor or prominent figures, for example, the ‘synagogue of the Augustesians/Augustans’, ‘synagogue of the Agrippesians/Agrippans’, and the ‘synagogue of the Volumnians’.<sup>488</sup> It may be that the ‘synagogue of Satan’ is a sarcastic expression for the synagogue’s affiliation to imperial power.

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<sup>486</sup> Craig de Vos, ‘Popular Graeco-Roman responses to Christianity’, Philip F. Esler (ed.), *The Early Christian World*, vol. 2 (2 vols.; London: Routledge, 2000), 869.

<sup>487</sup> de Vos, 869; cf. Plin. *Ep.* 1-96.2; 10.97.2; Euseb., *Hist. Eccl.* 4.9.

<sup>488</sup> Named after Emperor Augustus, Marcus Agrippa and Publius Volumnius respectively. Richardson, 95, 106, n. 25-27. Also, Lee I. Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue: The First Thousand Years* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 97.

Despite occasional skirmishes with members of the society, Jews were seen to integrate pretty well in the social-religious life of the imperial world.

Jewish names inscribed as ephebes or members of town councils, Jewish officers in Gentile armies, Jewish Hellenistic literati, Jewish contestants in, patrons of, or observers at athletic, dramatic or musical events ...—all these give the measure of Jewish participation in pagan worship. Sometimes the wheel squeaks (usually at the point of actual *latreia*: Jews notoriously avoided overt public cult, though essayed to compensate variously through dedications, patronage and prayer); sometimes it doesn't (Jews attended theatrical and athletic events, got good gymnasium educations where they could, joined Gentile armies, and lived public lives as municipal leaders).<sup>489</sup>

Not a few high-standing God-fearers or leading men of the society were favourable towards the synagogal community. In Acts 13:50 mentioned above, the Jews in Pisidian Antioch gathered the support of 'God-fearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city' against Christians. In Thessalonica, there were 'not a few leading women' attending the synagogue, who were won over by Paul's message (Acts 17:4). Similarly, prominent or highstanding (εὐσχημόνων) Greek women were attending the synagogue in Berea, who were converted hearing Paul preach (Acts 17:12, cf. 17:12). One can infer that these prominent women converting to Christianity were but a fraction of the total number of high-standing women in the synagogues. Cornelius, a centurion in the Italian Regiment, was also a god-fearer (Acts 10:1-2). It is evident that synagogues attracted members of the elite circles, who were well-connected politically.

In Asia Minor, there is evidence that Sardis had a powerful and socially integrated Jewish community. An excavated synagogue in Sardis was

converted from part of a large civic complex in the heart of the city, probably in the second half of the third century. It was a large building, with a capacity of over a thousand people, and it was richly decorated...There were eighty inscriptions on tablets, which had been attached to the walls, dealing with donations or vows (Kraabel 1992f, 229). Many donors call themselves "Sardinians," and at least eight are members of the city council (*bouleutēs*). There is also one former procurator, one count, and one official of the city archives. One refers

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<sup>489</sup> Fredriksen, 44. For evidence of Jewish participation in social life involving pagan rituals, see Yarbrow Collins, 'Insiders and Outsiders', 195-96.

to Samoe, “priest and teacher, probably more like Philo than a rabbi”...<sup>490</sup>

One sees here an example of a synagogue’s connection to social recognition, power and wealth. The social recognition of the Jews in Sardis goes back a long way to about 210 B.C.E. Evidence of their comfortable socio-standing decreed by imperial authorities is documented by Josephus.<sup>491</sup> There was also a considerable Jewish community in Smyrna according to Cecil Cadoux.<sup>492</sup> Jews were included among the donors who contributed 10, 000 *drachmai* for the welfare of the public at about 124 C.E. (*ISmyrna* 697).<sup>493</sup> The presence of a Jewish community in Smyrna in the first quarter of the second century would suggest a synagogue or a religious meeting place, even though the inscriptional evidence for a Jewish synagogue in Smyrna comes from the third and fourth centuries.<sup>494</sup> Lloyd Gaston writes,

Anatolian Jews were well established, independent, numerous, self-confident, and open to Hellenistic society without any compromising of their understanding of Judaism. Asian Judaism must have cast a powerful shadow for the early church to grow under...<sup>495</sup>

In contrast to the Jewish communities, which were relatively well-established and wealthy, Christians in Smyrna were poor (2:9) and those in Philadelphia had ‘little power’ (μικρά δύναμις; 3:8). It is interesting that the only two churches not blamed for anything were both presented as at odds with the synagogue. Their poverty or lowly social status could be in part because of their disassociation with both the synagogue and imperial cult. In Smyrna, we see an occasional opposition from synagogue members,<sup>496</sup> while in Philadelphia we detect a tense relation between the church and the synagogue (3:9). The Christians in Philadelphia are said to have kept Jesus’ commandment to endure pressure or opposition (3:10). From the

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<sup>490</sup> Lloyd Gaston, ‘Jewish Communities in Sardis and Smyrna’, in Richard S Ascough (ed.), *Religious Rivalries and the Struggle for Success in Sardis and Smyrna* (SCJ 14; Waterloo: Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2005), 17-39, see 19-20.

<sup>491</sup> For texts, Gaston, ‘Jewish Communities’, 17-18.

<sup>492</sup> Cecil John Cadoux, *Ancient Smyrna: A History of the City from the Earliest Times to 324 A.D.* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1938), 348.

<sup>493</sup> Gaston, ‘Jewish Communities’, 22.

<sup>494</sup> See Gaston, ‘Jewish Communities’, 22.

<sup>495</sup> L. Gaston, ‘Judaism of the Uncircumcised in Ignatius and Related Writers,’ in Stephen Wilson (ed.), *Anti-Judaism in Early Christianity: Separation and Polemic* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University, 1986), 33-44, see 40.

<sup>496</sup> The ‘βλασφημία’ is in the singular (2:9).

literary context, the pressure in Smyrna could have come from the abusive words of the Jews leading to imprisonment (2:9-10). Here, Judaistic and civic/imperial forces are juxtaposed at least *rhetorically* as working together. There could have been historical factors contributing to some tension between the synagogue and Christians. But what we know from literary sources is in itself rhetorically/polemically shaped. The Gospel of John writes of Christian Jews being forced out of the synagogue (John 9:22; 12:42). The *birkat haminim*, if already in force at the composition of Revelation, could have contributed to tensions between Judaistic and Christian Jews.<sup>497</sup> Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho* writes of the cursing of Christians by Jews in the synagogues (16.4; 47.4; 96.2; possibly 137.2).<sup>498</sup> The *birkat haminim* could have served as a general backdrop to the βλασφημία in Rev 2:9-10, but the occasional tension reported in the 'letters' do not appear too serious a situation. Certain tension with synagogue members does not necessarily mean that the anti-Judaistic rhetoric in Revelation (e.g., 2:9-10; 3:9) was in response to such tension or antagonistic speech/act. Instead, such rhetoric could actually be to combat Christian attraction to the synagogue.

## 2.4. Anti-Judaistic rhetoric in Revelation

We detect anti-Judaistic rhetoric in Revelation. In the letters to Christians in Smyrna and Philadelphia, the true 'Jew' is distinguished from the blasphemous/slanderous 'other' denied of the identity. With a similar tone, the author of the Gospel of John calls Satan, not 'Abraham' or 'God', the father of opposing Jews (8:37-44). The future repentance of some Jews in Revelation is described ironically (see 3:9). They surrender and acknowledge defeat in a demeaning way. In the 'visions' of Revelation, allusions to the Jewish war and the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple in 70 C.E. (cf. Rev 9 and 11:2-3) act as a stark reminder of God's judgement on the city (ch. 2). In addition, we see a redefinition of God's people in the choosing

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<sup>497</sup> For text of the twelfth benediction, refer to *b. Ber.* 28b; cf. Lawrence H. Schiffman (ed.), *Texts and Traditions: A Source Reader for the Study of Second Temple and Rabbinic Judaism* (Hoboken, New Jersey: KTAV, 1998), 415. For the text of the Eighteen Benedictions of Schechter's Geniza fragment, see David Instone-Brewer, 'The Eighteen Benedictions and the *MINIM* before 70 CE', *JTS* 54 (2003): 25-44, see 29-30. The insertion of the twelfth benediction is ascribed to Samuel the Small at the instruction of Gamaliel II, who headed the Academy in Yavneh from 80-110 C.E. Many scholars speculate that the date of the insertion is between 85/90 and 95 C.E. See Mayo, 42. A recent volume is Yaakov Y. Teppler, *Birkat Haminim: Jews and Christians in Conflict in the Ancient World* (trans. Susan Weingarten; TSAJ 120; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007).

<sup>498</sup> Mayo, 45.

and sealing of 144, 000 out of the twelve tribes of Israel to become a new elect community (7:1-8). Jesus, a character rejected in Judaism, shares a position equal to God in this community. The descent of the new Jerusalem crowns this redefinition (21:2). The new Jerusalem replaces the old Jerusalem trampled by gentiles (11:2) as the mother land of the 'true Jews'. There is 'no temple' in the new Jerusalem (21:22). The centre of the Judaistic religion is ironically replaced by God and a foreign authority to Judaism: Jesus. Furthermore, those wearing the beast's mark, symbolizing those with Judaistic affiliation, in the present reading (see §1.1), are punished in eternal hell-fire (19:20; 14:10-11). Even Satan, the attributed source of authority of the synagogue in Smyrna and Philadelphia, is ultimately destroyed (20:10). This anti-Judaistic rhetoric divests the synagogue of all its power.

Despite the separation between Christians and synagogue promoted by troubles in late Domitianic time, or the expelling of Christians from some synagogues (cf. John 9:22; 12:42, the *birkat haminim*, if in force), the parting of ways at the 'lay level' between Christians and the synagogal community could just have been at its preliminary stages at the end of the first century. It could have been precisely the rooted problem of Jewish affiliation and judaizing tendencies among Christian Jews and gentiles, respectively, that had called for such an aggressive rhetoric by the author of Revelation, and warranted some actions by synagogal leaders against Christians feigning affiliation to practice Christianity. We find an example of anti-Judaistic rhetoric used to combat synagogue affiliation among Christians in the '*Adversus Judaeos*' homilies of John Chrysostom delivered in Antioch, 386-387 C.E.<sup>499</sup>

The rhetoric in Revelation against the synagogue, the earthly Jerusalem and its temple is not meant to pick an inter-religious fight,<sup>500</sup> but is seen to play a similar role of discouraging its addressees from judaizing or affiliating with the synagogue, even under the threat of the imperial cult. The polemic against the Jewish contenders encourages Christians to build a distinct boundary between the 'us' and 'them'. The pejorative attributing of both imperial power and synagogue to Satan creates within the Christian reader a psychological barrier that wards off thoughts of compromise to

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<sup>499</sup> See Marvin Perry and Frederick M. Schweitzer (eds.), *Antisemitic Myths: A Historical and Contemporary Anthology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 6-10.

<sup>500</sup> The work was addressed to churches.

either camp. Affinity with a Christ/Christian-opposing synagogue which is blasphemous/slandering against Christ/Christians amounted to an act of apostasy to the author because such a synagogue rejects Christ. In Revelation, Jesus Christ is depicted in contrast as equal in position to God and is worshipped together with God (5:8, 13; 7:10, 17; 14:1, 4, 10; 15:3; 21:22, 23; 22:1, 3). Both their testimony and prophecy are central for the faith (1:1, 2; 19:10; 22:16). Jesus is so central that his followers are to risk their lives for him (1:9; 12:17; 14:12; 17:6; 20:4).

### **3. Conclusion**

Accusations were particularly rampant in the society late in Domitian's reign. The accusations of Christians were seen in relation to the Jewish tax matter and offences of *maiestas* and ἁθεότης. It is also noted that a tendency towards Jewish ways was a frequent accusation in connection with '*maiestas*' or 'ἁθεότης'. The offence of drifting into Jewish ways/lifestyle could have pertained to the judaizing tendency of Christians in Asia Minor. Gentile Christians might have sought affiliation with the synagogue under the social pressure to participate in the imperial cult. With the operation of the Flavian cult in Asia Minor in the 90s, enemies of Christians would have a good excuse to accuse Christians of not participating in it. Judaism (an ancestral religion recognised by Rome) could provide a convenient rationale for such non-participation. There were other benefits for Christians affiliating with a synagogue, especially if the synagogue had wealthy and powerful members.<sup>501</sup> Being associated with a powerful group would render one less susceptible to threats from other members of the society, and facilitate one's social mobility.

Though there was some pressure to separate from the synagogue, Christians continued to intermingle with the Jewish community. Cohen's study shows that it was difficult to distinguish between a Jew and one 'pretending' to be a Jew. He

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<sup>501</sup> Cohen writes about the lure of Jewish affiliation,

In situations where status as a Jew conferred privilege and/or esteem, that status will have been coveted by outsiders, and we may be sure that as a result some non-Jews converted to Judaism and others simply declared themselves as Jews. The Jews of Rome and of the cities of Asia Minor and Syria enjoyed a wide range of legal privileges, and at times were socially and economically prominent; in the Roman legal system the Jews of Egypt occupied a place above that of Egyptians. In these environments gentiles would have had strong incentive to declare themselves to be Jews, and it would have been relatively easy for them to do so, especially in places where the Jewish community was large.

Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness*, 68.

concludes, 'By observing Jewish practices and by associating with Jews, gentiles will have been called Jews and will have been mistaken as Jews'.<sup>502</sup> Outsiders and even insiders to the synagogal community might have been fooled by a person putting on an act.

We observed above (chs. 3 and 5) that the beast-worship and the wearing of its mark in Rev 13:11-18 could be interpreted as participation in imperial cult and synagogue affiliation among Christians. The dual-prohibition in 14:9-11 is seen to warn against these two behaviours. The highest degree of punishment (hell fire) is reserved for offenders. Naturally, the severity of the punishment reflects the utmost concern of the author against such behaviours. The mark of the beast is interpreted as a parody of the *teffilin*, which is in turn seen to represent judaizing behaviour or the act of Jewish affiliation. Such an act is demonized as the mark of the beast. We see imperial and Judaistic forces relegated to the same camp rhetorically. Even if one denies the mark of the beast as having anything to do with judaizing behaviour, judaizing behaviour still lay in the background of Revelation. We see a judaizing tendency among some Christians in Asia Minor,<sup>503</sup> and in the imperial world at large over the first few centuries. It may be that to some Christians, seeking affinity with Judaism may have seemed a lesser evil than involving in imperial worship. But in Revelation's rhetoric, both acts are equally criticised. Synagogal affiliation is portrayed as 'Satanic' (2:9; 3:9) and so is the worship of the emperor (the beast), who receives its power from dragon/Satan (13:2; cf. 12:9). The anti-Judaistic rhetoric could act to cultivate in the minds of the readers a distinct boundary between the church and the synagogue. It encourages Christian readers to remain true to God by not giving in to imperial worship and by not seeking/feigning affiliation with a community that rejects Christ. Jesus Christ is emphatically depicted as central to the Christian faith in Revelation. To the author, one cannot hope to choose either God or Christ, but should choose both God and Christ.

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<sup>502</sup> Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness*, 66-68.

<sup>503</sup> See Murray, 73-100.

### **PART THREE—ON THE POLEMIC AGAINST PROPHETESS 'JEZEBEL'**

*Having proposed an interpretation of the underlying issue in the polemic against the so-called 'Jews', we now turn our attention to the other major group of contenders, who have no qualms with fornication and eating idol-food. In particular, I study the context of the polemic against the wayward prophetess 'Jezebel', and perform a very specific reading of a hidden polemic against her that involves three woman figures. This covert polemic in the 'visions' rearing behind the face of a great harlot (Rev 17-18) and an associated OT queen goes hand in hand with the overt polemic in the 'letters' against the prophetess (Rev 2:20-24).*

*In Chapter Six, I first present the general circumstances which could have encouraged the two offences of 'Jezebel' and like company. I then propose a socio-historical picture of 'Jezebel' and her circumstances. (This I call 'character-construct 1'). In the following two chapters, I give attention to two other female figures that are called for by the text in relation to the polemic against the prophetess 'Jezebel', namely the Great Harlot of Rev 17-18 and an OT queen called Jezebel. Again, I study them in their socio-historical contexts, giving attention to the social-historical resonances their portrayals would evoke. (The picture constructed of them are character-constructs 2 and 3, respectively.) Finally, in Chapter Nine, I relate these three character-constructs together to demonstrate a reading of a hidden polemic against prophetess 'Jezebel' that I see latent in the text of Revelation.*



## Chapter Six: Meals, Associations and Imperial Cult as a Context for Eating Idol-Food and Sexual Immorality

In this chapter, I study the socio-historical contexts that could have contributed to the paired offences of sexual immorality and eating food sacrificed to idols. I followed on to construct a picture of a self-professed prophetess ‘Jezebel’ within her socio-historical context. The polemic against her will be further studied in the chapters following with two other characters. All three characters are studied in their social-historical contexts, and relevant aspects of them highlighted. They are finally shown to be depicted in a web of associations bringing shame to castigation to the ‘prophetess’, who is a main proponent of the paired offences.

The two prominent offences that the author contends against Christians in Asia Minor are the eating of meat sacrificed to idols (εἰδωλόθυτον, or simply called ‘idol-food’,<sup>504</sup>) and engaging in sexual immorality (πορνεύω). The paired offence is promoted by Balaam’s teaching (Rev 2:14), the Nicolaitans (2:15, cf. 2:6) and a false prophetess ‘Jezebel’ (2:20). It is unclear whether the adherents to Balaam’s teaching, to ‘Jezebel’ and the Nicolaitans all belong to the same faction, but they interestingly share the same characteristics. The Nicolaitans were *implicitly* ascribed with the same offences of Balaam’s teaching with the emphatic use of οὕτως and ὁμοίως (2:14-15). The offences took root in the churches of Pergamum (2:14-16) and Thyatira (2:20-25), but not in the church of Ephesus (2:6).

### 1. Eating Idol-Food in Meal Contexts

Social and religious<sup>505</sup> meals and banquets often included libations, hymns and other customary rites.<sup>506</sup> Meal offerings or animal sacrifices to patron deities could also be involved, following which the sacrificial food or victim could be consumed by

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<sup>504</sup> It is a pejorative counterpart to ἱερόθυτος or θεόθυτον (sacrificial victim offered to God). Cf. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 186. In the NT besides Rev 2:14, 20, the term εἰδωλόθυτος occurs in relation to the prohibition to eat idol-food in the Jerusalem council (Acts 15:29, 21:25) and in Paul’s discussion on idol-food (1 Cor 8:1, 4, 7, 10, 10:19). In the Septuagint, it occurs only once in 4 Macc. 5.2, in which Antiochus IV forces Jews to eat pork and food offered to idols (εἰδωλόθυτα). For a survey of some other non-biblical occurrences of the term before 200 C.E., see Derek Newton, *Deity and Diet: The Dilemma of Sacrificial Food at Corinth* (JSNTSup 169; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 179-83.

<sup>505</sup> The social and religious aspects of many Graeco-Roman functions are mutually non-exclusive.

<sup>506</sup> Cf. Plato *Symp.* 176A.

diners. In public sacrifices, especially at festivals and games, large amounts of sacrificial meat were involved and the public were invited to have a share of it.<sup>507</sup>

Animal sacrifice happened, though not invariably, in

meals of some social importance, such as in weddings, birthdays, the visits of returning friends or important persons and religious holidays. They are meals where quantities of food are eaten, wine flows freely, and conviviality reigns—true meals and not simply ritual events. At the same time, the rites performed over the food were of significance: just as the occasions called for spirited eating they also called for authentic thanksgiving to the Gods.<sup>508</sup>

After a sacrifice, θυσία, diners consumed portions of the sacrificial victim.<sup>509</sup> In other instances, food or sacrificial meat offered before the statues or laid on tables of idols was consumed by diners. An inscription noting a law of the cult association of Heracles and Diomedon depicts Heracles as being present at wedding dinners at the couch spread before his image in the shrine. Portions of sacrificial animals are then offered as food for his table.<sup>510</sup> According to Athenaeus (*Deip.* 9.372A-B) of Delphi, the one offering the largest onion to Leto could have a share of what was on the deity's table. Similarly, the ones filling the table of Men Tyrannos were entitled to half of it.<sup>511</sup> Apuleius describes a feast hosted on the second day of his initiation into the Isis mysteries, and on the third day, a ritual breakfast took place to mark his attainment of priesthood (*Metam.* 11.24).<sup>512</sup>

Papyri from Egypt dated from the second century C.E. onwards include invitations to meals of social and cultic occasions.<sup>513</sup> According to Fotopoulos' documentation,<sup>514</sup> there were some invitations to unnamed persons to dine on the

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<sup>507</sup> Ben Witherington III, *Making a Meal of It: Rethinking the Theology of the Lord's Supper* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2007), 34.

<sup>508</sup> Peter D. Gooch, *Dangerous Food: 1 Corinthians 8-10 in its Context* (SCJ 5; Ontario: Canadian Corporation for Studies in Religion, 1993), 31.

<sup>509</sup> Dennis E. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist: The Banquet in the Early Christian World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 69. In another kind of sacrifice termed σφάγιον, the sacrificial victim is slaughtered but not burnt. In such cases, the meat from the victim is not eaten. Ibid, 68.

<sup>510</sup> John Fotopoulos, *Food Offered to Idols in Roman Corinth: A Social-Rhetorical Reconsideration of 1 Corinthians 8:1-11:1* (WUNT 2. Reihe 151; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 175.

<sup>511</sup> Newton, 196; Fotopoulos, *Food Offered*, 175.

<sup>512</sup> Fotopoulos, *Food Offered*, 101.

<sup>513</sup> For references concerning the κλίνη of Sarapis, see Fotopoulos, *Food Offered*, 104, n.54.

<sup>514</sup> Fotopoulos, *Food Offered*, 106-10.

banqueting ‘couch’ (κλείνη/κλίνη<sup>515</sup>) ‘of Lord Sarapis’ (τοῦ κυρίου Σαράπιδος).<sup>516</sup> Some others pertain to cultic meals of sacred ‘offering’ (ἱέρωμα) to Lord Isis.<sup>517</sup> The venue of these meals could be at someone’s house,<sup>518</sup> at the Sarapion or at the house (οἶκος) of Sarapis,<sup>519</sup> the Thoerion,<sup>520</sup> the Demetreion,<sup>521</sup> the Sabazion,<sup>522</sup> the Lochion (λοχίος)<sup>523</sup> or gymnasium.<sup>524</sup> The occasions could be predominantly cultic or social, but there was no distinction between the religious and secular.<sup>525</sup> Meals with deities as host<sup>526</sup> or as subject of the meal<sup>527</sup> were more cultic in purpose. Another example of a cultic meal is a personal invitation to Paulina to dine and sleep with god Anubis in the temple. (Joseph. *A.J.* 18.65-80). Lucius’ feast celebrating his initiation into the mysteries of Isis (Apul. *Metam.* 11.24) is also another example. The kind of meal with a predominant social function might have

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<sup>515</sup> Youtie simply defines κλίνη as ‘banquet’, and sees the term as a development of the Greek θεοχένιον, or table spread before the god Sarapis. Herbert Chayyim Youtie, ‘The Kline of Sarapis’, *HTR* 41 (1948): 9-29, see 13. κλείνη, instead of κλίνη, is the spelling used in invitations. Chan-Hie Kim, ‘The Papyrus Invitation’, *JBL* 94 (1975): 391-402, see 395.

<sup>516</sup> P.Oxy. 110, 523, 1484, 1755, 2592, 3693, 4339, 4540; P.Olso. 157; P. Flor. 7 (= Sammelbuch 11049); P.Coll.Youtie 51 (= P.Columbia 548a); P.Coll.Youtie 52 (= P.Columbia 550a); P.Noviomagensis 4; P.Mil.Vogliano 68.57; cf. Fotopoulos, *Food Offered*, 106-9. P.Oxy. 523; 1755; cf. C. Kim, 398-401.

<sup>517</sup> P.Oxy. 4539; P.Fouad 76; cf. Fotopoulos, *Food Offered*, 110.

<sup>518</sup> P.Oxy. 523; P.Oslo. 157; P.Yale 85; P.Oxy. 4542, 4543; cf. Fotopoulos, *Food Offered*, 106-108; P.Oxy. 110, 524, 926, 1579; P.Fay. 132; Grafton Milne, ‘The Kline of Sarapis’, *JEA* 11 (1925): 6-9, see 6. SB 7745; P.Fouad 1 Univ. 7; P.Oxy. 2792; cf. C. Kim, 398-401.

<sup>519</sup> P.Oxy. 110, 2592, 3693, 1755, 2592, 3693, 4339, 4540; P.Flor. 7 (= Sammelbuch 11049); P.Coll.Youtie 52 (= P.Columbia 550a); P.Noviomagensis 4; P.Mil.Vogliano 68.57; cf. Fotopoulos, *Food Offered*, 106-109. P.Oxy. 2791; 1755; cf. C. Kim, 398-401.

<sup>520</sup> P.Oxy. 1484; P.Colon 2555 (= P.Köln 57 = Sammelbuch 10496); cf. Fotopoulos, *Food Offered*, 106, 108; cf. C. Kim, 398-401.

<sup>521</sup> P.Oxy. 1485; cf. Milne, 6.

<sup>522</sup> P.Oxy. 2678; C. Kim, 398-401.

<sup>523</sup> P.Coll.Youtie 51 (= P.Columbia 548a). cf. Fotopoulos, *Food Offered*, 108. λοχίος is translated as ‘birth-house’ by Gilliam due to the connection between Artemis’ epithet of λοχία as a protector of women in child birth, also a role of Isis. But Smith notes that the word λοχίος is not attested elsewhere in Greek. Smith, 318, n. 44; cf. J. R. Gilliam, ‘Invitations to the *Kline* of Sarapis’, in *Collectanea Papyrologica: Tests Published in Honor of H. C. Youtie*, vol. 1 (2 vols.; ed. Ann Ellis Hanson; PTA 19; Bonn: Rudolf Habelt, 1976), 315-24.

<sup>524</sup> P.Oxy 2147; C. Kim, 398-401.

<sup>525</sup> Cf. Smith, 77; Newton, 242.

<sup>526</sup> For example, in P.Colon 2555, there is the unnamed god, and in P.Oxy. 3694, the god Ammon and the village of Seryphis as co-host.

<sup>527</sup> E.g., in the ἱέρωμα of Lord Isis.

included weddings,<sup>528</sup> commemoration of an ἐπίκρισις<sup>529</sup> (‘admission to a level of status exempt from poll tax’), of a στέψις (‘crowning on entry to civic office’),<sup>530</sup> a common ξενία (evening meal),<sup>531</sup> birthdays,<sup>532</sup> one’s ‘coming of age’ (μελλοκύριος<sup>533</sup> or ἐφεβεία<sup>534</sup>), and the θεραπευτήρια of one’s daughter.<sup>535</sup> In many of these occasions, a deity presided or participated in the meal. In particular, according to Aelius Aristides (*Or.* 45, 27), Sarapis once held an important role before the people as uniquely a ‘full partner in their sacrifices’.<sup>536</sup> He was invited ‘to the feast’ (καλοῦντές τε ἐφ’ ἐστίαν) and was made both the

chief guest and host so that while different gods contribute to different banquets, he is the universal contributor to all banquets and has the rank of symposiarch for those who ever assemble for his sake...so he is a participant in the libations and is the one who receives the libations, and he goes as a guest to the party and invites those who party.<sup>537</sup>

καὶ προϊστάμενοι δαιτυμόνα αὐτὸν καὶ ἐστιάτορα, ὥστε ἄλλων ἄλλους ἐράνους πληρύντων κοινὸς ἀπάντων ἐράνων οὗτός ἐστι πληρωτὴς, συμποσιάρχου τάξιν ἔχων τοῖς ἀεὶ κατὰ ταυτὸν συλλεγομένοις.... αὐτὸς ὢν ὁμόσπονδός τε καὶ ὁ τὰς σπονδὰς δεχόμενος, ἐπὶ κῶμόν τε ἀφικνούμενος καὶ καλῶν ὡς αὐτὸν κωμαστὰς...<sup>538</sup>

During public festivals, the meat of animals sacrificed to deities was consumed.<sup>539</sup> A series of official invitations inscribed on stone invited various cities to join in a

<sup>528</sup> P.Oxy. 111, 524, 1486, 1487, 1579, 1580; P.Fay. 132; cf. Milne, 6. SB 7745; P.Fouad 1 Univ. 7; P.Oxy 927, 2678, cf. C. Kim, 398-401.

<sup>529</sup> P.Oxy. 926; cf. Milne, 6. P.Oxy. 2792; cf. C. Kim, 398-401.

<sup>530</sup> P.Oxy. 2147; cf. C. Kim, 398-401.

<sup>531</sup> P.Oxy. 747; cf. C. Kim, 398-401. Smith, 21.

<sup>532</sup> Fotopoulos, *Food Offered*, 103. For example, P.Mil.Vogliano 68.57; cf. Fotopoulos, *Food Offered*, 109; P. Oxy. 1214; cf. Milne, 6. P.Oxy. 2791; BGU 333, 112; cf. C. Kim, 398-401.

<sup>533</sup> Thus indicated in P.Oxy. 1484; cf. Milne, 6; cf. C. Kim, 398-401; Fotopoulos, *Food Offered*, 106.

<sup>534</sup> Smith, 131.

<sup>535</sup> P.Oxy. 4542, 4543; cf. Fotopoulos, *Food Offered*, 110. See Smith, 40-42, on the funerary banquet.

<sup>536</sup> Fotopoulos, *Food Offered*, 113.

<sup>537</sup> Trans: Fotopoulos, *Food Offered*, 113.

<sup>538</sup> Greek text: Aelius Aristides, *Aristides*, ex recensione Guilielmi Dindorfii (vol. 1; Wilhelm Dindorf, ed.; Leipzig: Weidmann, 1829), 94 (*Or.*, ‘To Sarapis’, 8.54).

<sup>539</sup> Fotopoulos, *Food Offered*, 174.

banquet hosted by Zeus of Panamara in Caria of Asia Minor.<sup>540</sup> This is an example of a massive banquet that is open to the people of different regions. There was naturally sacrificial meat for consumption. Sacrificial meat might also be bought from the markets or distributed in civic festivals to become part of meals at home or at other social settings.<sup>541</sup> ‘Many instances could be found of this consumption of sacred food in the setting of shared meals’, applicable to the elite and the common classes.<sup>542</sup>

Meals were an important part of social interaction and advancement in the Graeco-Roman world. Alex Cheung writes, ‘dining was also the primary means for social advancement in winning favors and benefits from one’s superiors’.<sup>543</sup> Refusal to participate in shared meals would have been an offence to the host.<sup>544</sup> Gooch gathers from literary sources (*ca.* 200 B.C.E. to *ca.* 200 C.E.) that<sup>545</sup>

meals in Greco-Roman society were a central focus of social intercourse, food was a significant marker of social status, food which had been used in sacrifice was often eaten... and the consumption of what Paul would call idol-food was unavoidable in normal social intercourse.<sup>546</sup>

The ‘basic social patterns such as household structures and conventions of social intercourse were fairly durable’ and ‘a strikingly consistent picture of eating practices emerges from materials of diverse character and period’.<sup>547</sup> This general context could apply equally to the eating of idol-food by members of the Corinthian church in Paul’s time and to the churches of Asia Minor later in the century.<sup>548</sup>

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<sup>540</sup> Smith, 81.

<sup>541</sup> Fotopoulos, *Food Offered*, 162.

<sup>542</sup> Gooch, 37. Gooch (pp. 31-38) provides a survey of different kinds of meal occasions that involved animal sacrifice and food dedicated to gods. Some examples are: holy feasts dedicated to gods, weddings, birthdays, occasions of thanksgiving, funerals, sacrifices at common meals.

<sup>543</sup> For example, Epictet. *Ench.* 25.4-5; Alex T. Cheung, *Idol Food in Corinth: Jewish Background and Pauline Legacy* (JSNTSup 176; Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 35.

<sup>544</sup> Cheung, 35.

<sup>545</sup> Gooch, 27-28.

<sup>546</sup> Gooch, 29.

<sup>547</sup> Gooch, 27.

<sup>548</sup> Gooch, 28.

## 2. Sexual Immorality in Meal Contexts

The accusation of committing sexual immorality (πορνεύω) in Revelation (2:14, 20) is often interpreted by scholars as a metaphorical expression of idolatry, and not in the literal sense.<sup>549</sup> However, it is possible that actual sexual activity is likely what is meant.<sup>550</sup> Brian Rosner observes the commonplace of prostitution during social and cultic contexts.

In the Graeco-Roman world prostitution at pagan cultic events was very common. As Catherine Edwards notes, various ancient texts indicate that sexual pleasure was often the expected sequel to a banquet (Cicero, *Phil.* 2:104-5; *De fin.* 2.23; Seneca, *Ep.* 47:7; 95:23) and sometimes prostitutes were explicitly mentioned as part of the after-dinner entertainment (e.g., Juv. 11:162-70; Cicero, *Pro Mur.* 13). We may add Dio Chrysostom (*Or.* 77/78.4), who writes that brothel-keepers “drag their stock” to the “great festive occasions.”<sup>551</sup>

He notes that ‘according to pagan, Jewish and Christian writers feasting and sexual immorality went inevitably together’.<sup>552</sup> John Fotopoulos writes of the attraction of social meals that provided pleasures of various kinds:

Sexual pleasure was an extremely popular component of formal meals in the Greco-Roman world. Certainly the attraction to formal meals was strong because of the implications for increasing social status and because of the extravagant food oftentimes served, but also because of the sexual encounters that could present themselves with the generous consumption of strong wine. Partners for sexual relations could take the form of harp-girls, flute-girls, prostitutes, courtesans (*hetairai*), other invited guests – preferably young men – or slaves serving the

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<sup>549</sup> For example, Philip A. Harland, ‘Honouring the Emperor or Assailing the Beast: Participation in Civic Life among Associations (Jewish, Christian and Other) in Asia Minor and the Apocalypse of John’, *JSNT* 77 (2000): 99-121, see 118; Philip Harland, *Associations, Synagogues, and Congregations: Claiming a Place in Ancient Mediterranean Society* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 204-5.

<sup>550</sup> Though I do not exclude the possibility that ‘πορνεύω’ can be used as metaphorical expression of idolatry or refer to syncretistic participation in the pagan activities, it appears that a literal interpretation is likely, given the general culture of the times. Also, in two other references to sexual immorality (21:8, 22:15) the offence is included in a list of vices presented literally. Osborne is open to both the use of metaphorical and literal meaning of πορνεύω in Revelation. Osborne, 144-45.

<sup>551</sup> Brian S. Rosner, ‘Temple Prostitution in 1 Corinthians 6:12-20’, *NovT* 40 (1998): 336-51, see 350; and Catherine Edwards, *The Politics of Immorality in Ancient Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 188.

<sup>552</sup> Rosner, 349. ‘Christian and pagan moralists agreed: eating, drinking, and sexual indulgence constitute an intimate and unholy trinity’. Alan Booth, ‘The Age of Reclining in and its Attendant Perils’, in William J. Slater (ed.), *Dining in a Classical Context* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 105.

meal. Tacitus<sup>553</sup> reports that the primary inducements to Romanization were oratory, banquets, and the toga which he said led to vice and servitude. Indeed, sexual encounters were such a widespread element of formal meals that Paulina's invitation to dine with the god Anubis and to sleep with him in the Temple of Isis in Rome did not appear to her – or to her husband – as being entirely unusual.<sup>554</sup>

Katheleen Corley's study too shows that sexual advances were commonplace in banquets,<sup>555</sup> and that the typical flute girls, dancers and entertainers and *hetaerae* (higher class prostitutes)<sup>556</sup> appearing in banquets were sometimes called 'public women' or 'women common to all' (γύναι πάγκοινε)<sup>557</sup> — a euphemistic term for 'whores'.<sup>558</sup> She observes that prostitutes and slave women were associated with public meals in Graeco-Roman literature well into the second century C.E.<sup>559</sup>

A Greek or Roman banquet began with a meal and was followed by a time of drinking and entertainment (which is called the συμπόσιον in Greek and the *convivium* or *comissatio* in Latin).<sup>560</sup> The flute-girl was a standard entertaining feature in a symposium, who sometimes became the target of sexual advances,<sup>561</sup> and who was often categorized with harlots in literary convention.<sup>562</sup> This stereotyping was common, but should not be applied invariably to all cases. The flute also served a ritual purpose in Greek sacrificial ceremony in providing music for the singing of

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<sup>553</sup> Agr. 21.

<sup>554</sup> Fotopoulos, *Food Offered*, 169.

<sup>555</sup> Corley notes that 'traditionally meal settings were associated with free sexuality' especially in relation to the symposium 'as a scene for erotic happenings' See examples in Achilles Tatius 1.4.4-5; 5.4-6; 6.2-5; Musonius Rufus, frag. 3; Pseudo-Lucian *Amor.* 42-43; Ov. *Metam.* 185-220; *Am.* 4; Kathleen E. Corley, 'Were the Women around Jesus really Prostitutes? Women in the Context of Greco-Roman Meals', in David Lull (ed.), *SBLSP* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 487-521, see 509-10 and n. 167. This typical view becomes a common motif used in literary works.

<sup>556</sup> Corley, 'Were the Women around Jesus really Prostitutes?', 490.

<sup>557</sup> E.g., Mel. *Anth. Graec.* 5.175 and 5.175; cf. Kathleen E. Corley, *Private Women Public Meals: Social Conflict in the Synoptic Tradition* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1993), 38-39.

<sup>558</sup> Though Roman matrons did occasionally attend banquets with their husbands they were not considered as fitting for the drinking-party afterwards. Corley, 'Were the Women around Jesus Really Prostitutes?' 493-94; see also 513 of a certain stigma attached to women attending public meals.

<sup>559</sup> Corley, *Private Women Public Meals*, 53.

<sup>560</sup> See Smith, 27-31 for the order of the Greek and Roman banquet.

<sup>561</sup> Smith, 35.

<sup>562</sup> Smith, 35. 'Flute girls are classed with dancing girls and other harlots' in Ath. 13.607a-608. Smith, 306, n. 105.

the paean.<sup>563</sup> Games such as κότταβος,<sup>564</sup> often with sexual favours as rewards, were played in the Greek tradition, apart from other games such as riddles, intellectual exercises<sup>565</sup> and entertainment provided by ‘dancers, acrobats, and various types of musicians’.<sup>566</sup> One favourite penalty was to ‘dance round naked or to carry the flute-player three times round the room’.<sup>567</sup>

In addition, the enactment of cultic myths through dances could be titillating. Hans Licht comments,

Besides the public festivals, banquets and drinking-bouts in particular afforded the opportunity of enjoying the spectacle of the dance, accompanied by the insinuating sounds of music, especially the sensual flutes.<sup>568</sup>

In Xenophon’s *Symposium* about a celebration of a victory by Autolycus at the Greater Panathenaea games in 421 B.C.E.,<sup>569</sup> the closing entertainment was a mimic dance in which Dionysus and Ariadne were portrayed in a romantic interlude that aroused such intense desires in the banqueters that

οἱ δὲ γεγαμηκότες ἀναβάντες ἐπὶ τοὺς ἵππους ἀπήλυνον πρὸς τὰς ἑαυτῶν γυναῖκας, ὅπως τούτων τύχοιεν.

those who were unwedded swore that they would take to themselves wives, and those who were already married mounted horse and rode off to their wives that they might enjoy them.<sup>570</sup>

Sexual titillation is seen to be part of some banquet entertainment.

The festivities of Bacchus are described in Aristophanes’ comedy *The Acharnians*, in which the hero Dikaiopolis has his fair share of wine and sexual pleasure with courtesans (1147-49, 1197-1201, 1209).<sup>571</sup> Dikaiopolis invokes the god

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<sup>563</sup> Plut. *Quaest. conv.* 712F-713A; Smith, 35.

<sup>564</sup> It consists of flinging the last drops of wine at a target in the centre of the room. Smith, 34.

<sup>565</sup> Smith, 34.

<sup>566</sup> Smith, 35.

<sup>567</sup> Hans Licht, *Sexual Life in Ancient Greece* (trans. J. H. Freese; ed. L. H. Dawson; London: Kegan Paul International, 2002), 158; cf. Lucian *Sat.* 4.

<sup>568</sup> Licht, 156.

<sup>569</sup> Mark Golden, *Sport and Society in Ancient Greece* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 74.

<sup>570</sup> Xen. *Symp.* 9.7 (Todd, LCL).

<sup>571</sup> Martha Habash, ‘Two Complementary Festivals in Aristophanes’ *Acharnians*’, *AJP* 116 (1995): 559-77, see 573-74.



of sex, Phales, to be his drinking companion (277, cf. 264) during the festival of the Rural Dionysia. In the feast on the Choes, the second day of the Anthesteria festival, the host supplies (1089-94), besides sweetmeats and cakes,

[c]ouches, tables, pillows, and covers to ensure physical comfort. Garlands, incense, whores, and beautiful dancing girls provide the proper atmosphere for revelry.<sup>572</sup>

Though the work is no doubt fictional, Martha Habash comments, 'The whole feast is, in fact, very Dionysiac: wine, food, flute-players, drinking contests, ease and sex.'<sup>573</sup> Although this description of Dionysiac festivals was dated to the fifth century B.C.E., the mood of revelry, carousal and sexual frenzy of the Bacchic orgies continued into the Common Era.<sup>574</sup>

Intemperance in a symposium, particularly under the influence of wine, was a common portrayal in literary and art works.

The themes of drunkenness and prurient entertainment became stock features in various portrayals of symposia. Symposia in fact became infamous for extravagant and even bizarre behavior by entertainers and by the banqueters themselves. Various promiscuous and lewd activities became stock subjects for vase painters and were widely represented. The images range from showing the diners being sexually teased to their actually sharing sexual favors. Their paramours are both female prostitutes (often flute girls) and young boys. Clearly the erotic themes were well established in the symposium tradition so that the vase paintings can be interpreted to represent both an idealization and an aspiration for the dinner party. These themes were also taken up by various moralists and critics of society such as the satirists who exaggerated the decadent activities at symposia for effect.<sup>575</sup>

The excessiveness of banqueting is also portrayed in art. Wall paintings of the first century C.E. adorning the *triclinium* (dining hall) of a house in Pompeii, known as the House of the Chaste Lovers (IX 12.6), depict half and scantily-clad lovers and their companions at different levels of drunkenness in the symposium.<sup>576</sup> No doubt,

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<sup>572</sup> Habash, 573.

<sup>573</sup> Habash, 573.

<sup>574</sup> Its excessiveness grew out of hand and the Bacchic cult was expelled from Italy in 189 B.C.E; cf. Livy, 39.13. In 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> century, Augustine still complains of the excessive licentiousness of the orgies celebrated in honour of Liber/Bacchus (*Civ.* 7.21).

<sup>575</sup> Smith, 36.

<sup>576</sup> Katherine M. D. Dunbabin, *The Roman Banquet: Images of Conviviality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 53-55, Pl. 1, Fig. 26, Pl. 2.

the cushioned couch and the common reclining posture<sup>577</sup> of meals made sexual advances convenient. Corley discusses the ‘erotic scene of the banquet’ depicted in art:

[T]he erotic Greek image of the banquet replete with prostitutes is paralleled in Roman art. Moreover, an erotic bacchanal scene survives on an Etruscan ash urn that includes women, and in the ruins of Pompeii can be found an erotic mosaic of an open-air banquet scene. Erotic banquet scenes are a characteristic motif of Arretine art.<sup>578</sup>

Though artistic impressions are subjected to exaggeration and can be selective in portrayal, they are usually representative of some aspects of reality. The night-long Bacchic mystery rite of initiation involves drinking and feasting. This involves promiscuous intercourse and all sorts of evil deeds according to Livy 39.8-18.<sup>579</sup> This is an extreme manifestation of feasting and sexual promiscuity.

Even though drunkenness and excessive behaviours, not least due to the influence of wine, were a common part of the Graeco-Roman symposium, not all hosts settled for such excesses. For instance, the Symposium of Plato describes a particular time when the flute girl is dismissed to make way for sober conversation.<sup>580</sup> Plutarch advocates temperance in banquets with philosophical discussion.<sup>581</sup> Similarly, Cicero speaks through Cato on the pleasure of conversations with friends being preferable to physical pleasure during one’s old age.<sup>582</sup> Respecting the diverse occasions for the evening meal, not all Graeco-Roman meal gatherings would end up in the same kind of ‘pleasurable’ way. In Philo’s

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<sup>577</sup> The practice of reclining for meals, initially for the aristocratic, was adopted by lower social groups, so it was quite a common thing to recline during formal meals, though slaves, children and possibly women folk would not normally have the luxury of doing so. Cf. Dunbabin, 13. Dunbabin adds that it is not certain that all meals are of a reclining kind, especially for meals of humbler associations that involve slaves. Dunbabin, 99.

<sup>578</sup> Corley, *Private Women Public Meals*, 34-35.

<sup>579</sup> Robert. M. Grant, ‘Charges of “Immorality” against Various Religious Groups in Antiquity’, in M. J. Vermaseren and R van den Broek, *Studies in Gnosticism and Hellenic Religions* (EPRO; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981), 161-70, see 161.

<sup>580</sup> Plato *Symp.* 176E; Smith, 307, n. 120.

<sup>581</sup> Plut. *Quest. conv.* 7.7; Smith, 37. Witherington notes that a

cursory reading of Plutarch’s *Lives* will show that drinking parties with disorderly conduct, flaunting of excess and extravagance, treachery and plotting, sexual dalliance with serving girls and others and general immorality and debauchery were not uncommon.

Witherington, 35.

<sup>582</sup> Cic. *Sen.* 13.45-14.46; Smith, 307, n. 125.

description of banquets, contrasting those of the ascetic *therapeutae*, there is no mention of sexual immorality, but rather excessive violence under the influence of unmixed wine (*Contempl.* 5.40-47). But we can conclude generally that sexual immorality was not uncommon in Graeco-Roman meal settings.

### 3. Meals and Associations

The question of eating sacrificial food and sexual immorality in some churches of Revelation may have arisen in connection with feasts, banquets and dinners of guilds and associations. Dennis Smith observes that banqueting was '[t]he most visible and widespread social activity of clubs'.<sup>583</sup> Though associations served a variety of purposes, there were some clubs whose primary purpose was to get together to eat and drink. This is reflected in their names, such as the 'Late-night Drinkers' (*seribibi*),<sup>584</sup> 'Society of Diners' (*collegium comestorum*), 'Table-companions of Concord' (*convictor Concordiae*), 'Table-companions of those who customarily [gather] to eat a meal' (*convictores qui una epula vesci solent*), 'Comrades of the Symposium' (*sodales ex symposia*), and 'Banqueters of Elvenia' (*triclinium Elvenianum*).<sup>585</sup> Many social and cultic meals took place in the network of guilds, associations or clubs.<sup>586</sup> Seland notes, 'Participation in symposia and associations was a central part of the collective life' in Greek cities, though he adds that other social networks were also present. He further stresses on the role of religion in all levels of social life and social activities.<sup>587</sup> We saw in the dinner invitations above (§1) that many of these meals were held in buildings belonging to cultic associations,

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<sup>583</sup> Smith, 96.

<sup>584</sup> Smith, 96; cf. Jean-Pierre Waltzing, *Étude historique sur les corporations professionnelles chez les Romains* (4 vols; Louvain: Peeters, 1895-1900), 3.117, no. 387; similarly in *CIL* 4.581.

<sup>585</sup> Smith, 96; Waltzing, 1.323, n. 2.

<sup>586</sup> Harland employs the term 'associations' to refer to 'small unofficial groups that gathered together on a regular basis for a variety of interconnected social and religious purposes'. The terms used in Asia Minor such as σύνοδος, συνεδρίον, θίασος, μύσται, κοινόν, and συνεργασία can belong to this category. Philip Harland, 'Imperial Cults within Local Cultural Life: Associations in Roman Asia' *Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 17 (2003): 85-107, see 86, n. 4. Roman associations and clubs could be called *collegium*, *corpus*, *sodalitas*, *sodalitium*, and more generally *collegia*. Smith, 95. For categories, see also Smith, 106.

For this paper, 'associations', 'guilds' or 'clubs' may be used as near synonyms to refer to the many groups that spring up in the Greco-Roman world for the mutual benefit of their members, though I would use tend to use 'guilds' in reference to occupational groups.

<sup>587</sup> Torrey Seland, 'Philo and the Clubs and Associations of Alexandria', in Kloppenborg and Wilson (eds.), 110-27, see 4-5.

such as the Sarapion, Thoerion, Demetreion or Sabazion. In particular, the archeological remains of a banqueting hall of a Dionysiac cult association in Pergamum (called the 'Hall of Benches')<sup>588</sup> indicate that meals were an integral part of the activities of associations. Cicero, through Cato his mouthpiece, recalls regular participation in the feasts of a particular association that was established after the Mater Magna's official reception into Rome. (Cic. *Sen.* 13.45).

The numerous occupational guilds impinged on the lives of members in the churches of Asia Minor. These diverse associations reflected a range of trades and pertained to groups of various social-economic status.<sup>589</sup> Harland's survey of occupational associations in Asia Minor reflects the

associations of those who supplied the necessities of life, including bakers, fishers, and farmers, as well as builders and physicians. Associations of clothing producers are well attested throughout Asia, especially in Phrygian towns such as Thyatira where there were guilds of clothing cleaners, leather cutters, leather tanners, linen workers, and dyers. Producers and sellers of other amenities, such as potters, smiths in copper, silver, and gold, and merchants and shippers who dealt with various goods likewise formed associations. Entertainment in the form of festivals was an essential aspect of the social and religious life that is reflected in the prominence of guilds of Dionysiac performers and athletes devoted to Heracles....<sup>590</sup>

Besides occupational guilds, in which cultic rituals were an integral part of their social functions, there were cultic associations specially devoted to various deities. Smith lists private colleges of foreign gods, especially those of Bacchus, Cybele, Isis and Mithras. The *collegia Isidis* is 'among the most common private colleges' and is 'found throughout the empire'.<sup>591</sup> Harland notes in particular the

many associations of initiates (*mystai*) in "the mysteries" in Asia Minor, including those devoted to Isis and Serapis, the Great Mother (Cybele), Demeter and Kore, and Dionysos....Associations devoted to Egyptian deities, especially initiates in the mysteries of Isis and Serapis, are attested in Asia.<sup>592</sup>

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<sup>588</sup> Harland, *Associations*, 78-79.

<sup>589</sup> See Harland, *Associations*, 42.

<sup>590</sup> Harland, *Associations*, 38. List of sources on the various groups on pp. 39-40.

<sup>591</sup> Smith, 95.

<sup>592</sup> Harland, *Associations*, 45.

Harland notes the popularity of the Eleusinian deities, Demeter and Kore, especially in Ephesus, Smyrna and Pergamum.<sup>593</sup> The mysteries of Dionysos/Bacchus were, nonetheless, best attested in Asia.<sup>594</sup> Other deities were worshipped in some other associations, for example Zeus, Agdistis and the deified wife of Augustus, Livia, called in an instance the ‘new Hera’ (Ἡρᾶν ν[έαν]) and Roma, ‘the benefactor of the cosmos’ ([τ]ὴν εὐεργέτιν τοῦ κόσμου[ου]).<sup>595</sup> Patron deities were known for occupational associations (Artem. *Onir.* 2.33-44). Nelson Kraybill attests, ‘All guilds at Rome and in the East had a religious character, often centered on the patron gods or goddesses of the association.’<sup>596</sup>

Religious activity of occupational associations is evident in that guild buildings from excavations in Ostia often included ‘sanctuaries and banqueting facilities’.<sup>597</sup> Other signs of religious activity included dedications of premises to gods, statues of deities, and inscriptions indicating cultic practices. For example, an association of ‘merchants, shippers, and traders’ from Berytus in Syria dedicated the courtyard of the guild building ‘to the gods of the homeland’ (θεοῖς πατρίοις; *IDélos*, 1774). Within the guild building were found a statue of Aphrodite and Pan, an inscription giving an account of the guild’s festivals for Poseidon (*IDélos* 1520) and several shrines to Roma, the guild benefactor (*IDélos* 1778), Poseidon (*IDélos* 2325) and some ‘gods of the homeland’, such as Astarte and possibly Herakles-Melkart (*IDélos* 1774, 1776, 1781, 1783, 1785, 1789).<sup>598</sup> In Asia Minor itself, we have an epitaph from Teira (near Ephesus) in which a grain measurer makes provisions for an annual wine banquet for Poseidon;<sup>599</sup> whereas an association of physicians refers to itself as ‘the physicians who sacrifice to ancestor Asklepios and to the *Sebastoi*’ ([οἱ] θύοντες τῷ προπάτορι Ἀσκληπιῷ καὶ τοῖς Σεβαστοῖς];

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<sup>593</sup> Harland, *Associations*, 45-46.

<sup>594</sup> Harland, *Associations*, 46.

<sup>595</sup> Harland, *Associations*, 62; cf. the latter two are evidenced in the first century in *IAssos* 19, 20, respectively.

<sup>596</sup> Kraybill, 117; see also C. A. Forbes, ‘Ancient Athletic Guilds’, *CP* 50 (1955): 238-52, see 245.

<sup>597</sup> Harland, *Associations*, 63.

<sup>598</sup> Harland, *Associations*, 66-69.

<sup>599</sup> Harland, *Associations*, 69.

*IEphesos* 719; of early second century).<sup>600</sup> Harland provides ably many more examples of the religious dimension of associations.

Members of the associations interact with the deities through '[p]rayers, singing, music, and dancing' and even through 'mysteries' for the initiates. The interaction with deities can be for seeking

concrete favors, guidance, or protection from the gods through prayers. In response, votive offerings or gifts for the gods (*euchai*) were one way of recognizing fulfillment of a prayer request, expressing gratitude for the deities' benefactions.<sup>601</sup>

The cultic dimension of 'virtually all types of associations' is evident.<sup>602</sup> Besides sacrifices to traditional deities, guilds and associations performed sacrifices for and to deified emperors of the imperial cult as a sign of gratitude for imperial benefaction. The participation in such guilds, their banquets and cultic festivities determined one's social mobility and continual participation in a trade.<sup>603</sup>

Economically and socially, one was tied up closely with these guilds.<sup>604</sup>

Membership in an occupation-based association or "guild" (*synergasia*, the most common designation) was less than "voluntary" in the sense that, if one was a dyer or merchant, one naturally or by default (so to speak) associated with one's fellow workers in the guild of dyers or merchants.<sup>605</sup>

At the point of Revelation's composition, trade guilds were said to be 'on the threshold' of their prominence in the second century.<sup>606</sup> In particular, the maritime associations gained prominence in the middle of the first century and early second century C.E.<sup>607</sup> This fact is noteworthy given the prominence of the occupations of

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<sup>600</sup> Harland, *Associations*, 69.

<sup>601</sup> Harland, *Associations*, 71.

<sup>602</sup> Harland, *Associations*, 44.

<sup>603</sup> Kraybill attests to the necessity of participation in guilds for traders to be commercially viable. The participation helps one to advance in business and trade. Kraybill, 111, 131.

<sup>604</sup> Meals were opportunities to build social networks and friendships and to fulfil socio-political obligations. Christians faced social pressures to participate in communal meals involving idol-food. Pressure came from the social etiquette to eat what was set on the table. Newton, 242-51.

<sup>605</sup> Harland, *Associations*, 38.

<sup>606</sup> Kraybill, 112 and n.51. For examples of guilds in Asia Minor in the first century and beyond, see T. R. S. Broughton, 'Asia Minor under the Empire, 27 BC-337 AD', in T. Frank (ed.), *An Economic Survey of Ancient Rome*, vol. IV of *Africa, Syria, Greece, Asia Minor* (6 vols.; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1938), 593-902, see 821-49.

<sup>607</sup> Kraybill, 116.

the maritime trade in Rev 18, which mentions the captain or steersman (κυβερνήτης, v. 17), passenger on board a ship (ὁ ἐπὶ τόπον πλέων, v. 17), sailors (ναῦται), those who earn a livelihood by the sea (ὅσοι τὴν θάλασσαν ἐργάζονται, v. 17), the merchants (ἔμποροι, vv. 3, 15) and kings (v. 9) of other lands, likely those benefiting from maritime trade. All these living off sea trade are affected financially by the fall of 'Babylon', which is Rome in a sense. But if Chapter Seven suggests that Babylon also represents goddesses, the depiction of her destruction could be an attack on the economic system operating on a networking of trade guilds patronized by deities. Associations of shippers and merchants had a long history.<sup>608</sup> Patron goddesses such as Aphrodite and Isis were worshipped by merchants from Cyprus and Egypt respectively as early as 333 B.C.E.<sup>609</sup> Isis and Aphrodite are part of the Great Harlot's portrayal, as I will suggest (ch. 7, §2.1 and 2.2). Besides the guilds of merchants, shippers, and traders mentioned above, an 'association of the Tyrian merchants and shippers of Hercules' (in dative: τῷ κοινῷ τῶν Τυρίων Ἡρακλειστῶν ἐμπόρων καὶ ναυκλήρων) is also attested in an inscription from 154-53 B.C.E. (*IDélos* 1519).<sup>610</sup> Closer to the time of Revelation, a house of ship-owners at Nicomedia in Bithynia is attested according to epigraphy from about 70 C.E.<sup>611</sup> The sea traders in Rev 18 would likely have belonged to maritime trade and shipping associations.

#### **4. The Imperial Cult Permeates Associations**

Harland notes dimensions of the imperial cult permeating the functions of the guilds and associations.

The cultural landscape of Roman Asia was permeated by festivals, rituals, and temples that included the emperors and imperial family or *Sebastoi* ('revered ones'), and there are [*sic*] associations that reflect this context in their internal ritual life. Alongside provincial and civic imperial cult in institutions and temples stood unofficial forms of rituals in honor of the revered ones, some within smaller group settings.<sup>612</sup>

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<sup>608</sup> Kraybill, 115.

<sup>609</sup> Kraybill, 115.

<sup>610</sup> Kraybill, 116.

<sup>611</sup> Kraybill, 116; cf. *IGRom* III.4; *CIG* III, 3778.

<sup>612</sup> Harland, *Associations*, 116.

Kraybill attests to the integral part of imperial cult in guilds and associations.

By the late first or early second century, some form of the imperial cult also found expression in nearly every guild....In part this stemmed from the fact that guilds typically sought wealthy and influential patrons, the very people most likely to be involved in the imperial priesthood. It was common for trade guilds and merchant guilds to recognize the Emperor himself as the most revered patron.<sup>613</sup>

The honouring of imperial authorities in the functions of guilds and associations brings social recognition to the associations and their members. Recent studies on Revelation rightly emphasize the role of the imperial cult in the interpretation of the book.<sup>614</sup> Within this main emphasis, less attention is given to the imperial cult's role in the guilds and associations integral to the social identity of common people who were less likely to be involved in the provincial cults.<sup>615</sup> Though not working specifically with Revelation in mind, Harland's study provides a helpful study on this. He writes,

Overall, cultic honors for imperial gods (*Sebastoi*) could be a significant component in the life of associations, proposing something to us about the self-understanding or identity of these groups, about how they understood their place within the context of polis, empire, and cosmos. Contrary to the traditional view, such practices were not merely expressions of political loyalty. Rather, they were religious expressions in the same sense that one could speak of religious expressions toward traditional gods, all of which were intertwined within social, political and other dimensions of life in the polis.<sup>616</sup>

Harland argues against a downplay of the integrated religious dimension of associations. He shows that 'all types of associations served a variety of

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<sup>613</sup> Kraybill, 117.

<sup>614</sup> Friesen, *Imperial Cults*. He notes the prevalence of the imperial cult in the social life:

Sacrificial activity for the emperors took place in a myriad of contexts. Emperors were worshipped in their own temples, at temples of other gods, in theatres, in gymnasia, in stoas, in basilicas, in judicial settings, in private homes and elsewhere. Imperial cults were everywhere.

Steven J. Friesen, 'Satan's Throne, Imperial Cults and the Social Settings of Revelation', *JSNT* 27 (2005), 351-73, see 363.

<sup>615</sup> Harland raises awareness of the integral role of associations in daily life in connection with the imperial cult. See Philip A. Harland, 'Honours and Worship: Emperors, Imperial Cults and Associations at Ephesus (first to third centuries C.E.)', *SR* 25 (1996): 319-34.

<sup>616</sup> Harland, *Associations*, 123.



interconnected social, religious, and funerary functions for their members' and that 'honouring of gods and goddesses' together with the 'imperial dimension' is an important part of their function.<sup>617</sup> He does not see imperial deities treated as lesser deities than traditional deities, of which Price seems to give an impression.<sup>618</sup> Imperial deities were honoured with similar kinds of rituals, such as sacrifices offered to them and other deities. Associations sometimes dedicated altars to imperial gods<sup>619</sup> and other structures to the Σεβαστοί, as in the case of a guild of merchants in Thyatira (*TAM* V 862).<sup>620</sup> A monument was dedicated to Hadrian, who was called 'Olympios, savior and founder' (in accusative case: Ὀλύμπιον, σωτήρα καὶ κτίστην; *ISmyrna* 622).<sup>621</sup> Another guild of shippers had their sanctuary dedicated to Vespasian (*TAM* IV 22; 70-71 C.E.).<sup>622</sup> It is likely that sacrifices or some kind of honours were made to the imperial deities on these altars and within these structures. An occupational group in Ephesus, mentioned above, an association of physicians is named for their sacrifice to Asklepios and to the Σεβαστοί (*IEphesos* 719).<sup>623</sup>

There were mysteries performed in connection with the Σεβαστοί. An inscription in the time of Domitian (*IEphesos* 213; dated to about 88-89 C.E.) reveals 'mysteries and sacrifices performed each year in Ephesus...to Demeter Karpophoros and Thesmophoros and to the revered gods by the 'initiates...together with the priestesses' (Μυστήρια καὶ θυσίαι...καθ' ἕκαστον ἐνιαυτὸν ἐπιτελοῦνται ἐν Ἐφέσῳ Δήμητρὶ Καρποφόρῳ καὶ Θεσμοφόρῳ καὶ θεοῖς Σεβαστοῖς ὑπὸ μυστῶν...σὺν ταῖς ἱερίαις).<sup>624</sup> The consent to the mysteries performed annually for most years is indicated by official letters issued by kings, Σεβαστοί and incumbent proconsuls.<sup>625</sup> One concludes:

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<sup>617</sup> Harland, *Associations*, 55.

<sup>618</sup> Price's argument is that imperial gods are not 'sacrificed to' but sacrificed 'on behalf of'. Cf. S. Price, 207-33. Harland's study shows that no such distinction exists. Harland, *Associations*, 127-28.

<sup>619</sup> Harland, *Associations*, 127.

<sup>620</sup> Harland, *Associations*, 127.

<sup>621</sup> Philip Harland, 'Spheres of Contention, Claims of Pre-eminence: Rivalries among Associations in Sardis and Smyrna', in Ascough (ed.), 53-63.

<sup>622</sup> Harland, 'Imperial cults', 96.

<sup>623</sup> Harland, *Associations*, 127.

<sup>624</sup> Harland, *Associations*, 117.

<sup>625</sup> Harland, *Associations*, 117.

- (1) The imperial mysteries were performed together with those of the traditional deities; and these had been going on for some time already, with official consent provided for their performance.
- (2) The imperial mysteries were performed in the context of a religious association (in this case, that of Demeter) by the initiates and priestesses of the mysteries of Demeter.

Friesen accedes to the probable widespread practice of incorporating imperial mysteries into existing mystery organizations, even though this aspect is not too readily reflected in extant evidence.<sup>626</sup>

Hymns were sung in imperial cults. An association of hymn singers provided for extended feasts celebrating Augustus' birthday and the mysteries, with sacrifices to Augustus and Roma (*IPergamon* 374). Lamps for the images of *Sebastoi* are mentioned, thus indicating the conduct of imperial mysteries.<sup>627</sup> In another example, a Dionysaic company (σπεῖρα) in Thracia consists of officers in charge of lamps and also of sebastophants, with titles of officers in charge of the Dionysiac mysteries (*IGBulg* 1517; *Cillae*, 241-44 C.E.).<sup>628</sup> Part of a monument records words of thanks to the 'hymn singers' (οἱ...ὑμνωδοὶ), who had gathered 'from all Asia' ([ἀπὸ πά]σης Ἀσίας), in Pergamon to the 'most sacred birthday of god Augustus Tiberius Caesar (τῇ ἱερῷ[τάτῃ τοῦ Σεβα]στοῦ Τιβερίου Καίσαρος [θεοῦ γενεθλίῳ ἡ]μέρᾳ). In the event, they 'hymned the revered household, accomplishing sacrifices to the *Sebastoi* gods, leading festivals and banquets' (καθυ[μνοῦντες τὸν Σεβα]στὸν οἶκον καὶ το[ῖς] [Σεβαστοῖς θεοῖς θυσία]ς ἐπιτελοῦν[τες] [καὶ ἑορτὰς ἄγοντες καὶ ἐσ]τιάσεις) and, as importantly, they brought 'glory' ([δόξα]ν) to the association concerned (*IEphesos* 3801).<sup>629</sup>

Some associations devoted themselves to the emperors. There are many attestations of associations in Asia named as 'friends' of kings and emperors, such as 'the friends of Agrippa' (Οἱ φιλαγρίππαι) at Smyrna (*ISmyrna* 331),<sup>630</sup> 'friends of

<sup>626</sup> Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 116. Friesen gives an instance of the imperial cult celebrated as part of a Dionysos cult. The offices named, 'priest', 'hierophant' and 'curator', belonged to the structure of a mystery cult. Hadrian was enthroned with Dionysos by the initiates in this cult. *Ibid.*, 115-16.

<sup>627</sup> Harland, *Associations*, 131.

<sup>628</sup> Harland, *Associations*, 131.

<sup>629</sup> Cf. Harland, 'Imperial cults', 94-95.

<sup>630</sup> Harland, *Associations*, 125.

*sebastoi* (φιλοσέβασ[τοι]) at Pergamum (*IPergamonAsklep* 84), ‘friends-of-Caesar brotherhood’ (φράτραων φιλοκεσαρέων) at Ilion.<sup>631</sup> A certain man was honoured by the Caesarists ([Κ]αيسαριασταί) near Smyrna for his sacrifices, on behalf of the association, for the Σεβαστοί and for the accompanying banquets (*IGRom* IV 1348).<sup>632</sup>

Harland observes in a study that associations contended to some degrees ‘for economic support and benefactions and for the honour and prestige that... connections with the elites entailed’.<sup>633</sup> This competition, I believe, would motivate associations to honour elite benefactors,<sup>634</sup> of whom the emperor would be the most powerful in the human realm. Participation in the imperial cult, either directly or through able intermediate benefactors,<sup>635</sup> was thus beneficial and necessary for associations that wanted to do well in the society. This would result in the imperial gods permeating through all levels of the society, right down to the trade guilds, which were at the very subsistence level of the commoners. Furthermore, the cultural system of the ancient Mediterranean encouraged ‘the pursuit of honour and the avoidance of shame’.<sup>636</sup> Dio Chrysostom writes that many

have even given up their lives just in order that they might get a statue and have their name announced by the herald or receive some other honor and leave to succeeding generation a fair name and remembrance of themselves.<sup>637</sup>

Τεθνήκασιν, ὅπως ἀνδριάντος τύχωσι καὶ κηρύγματος ἢ τιμῆς ἑτέρας καὶ τοῖς αὖθις καταλίπωσι δόξαν τινὰ ἐπιεικῇ καὶ μνήμην ἑαυτῶν.

The patron-client structures common in the social relationships typical of the Graeco-Roman world extend to clubs and associations.<sup>638</sup> ‘Rich men — or women —

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<sup>631</sup> H. W. Pleket, *The Greek Inscriptions in the ‘Rijksmuseum Van Oudheden’ at Leyden* (Leiden: Brill, 1958).

<sup>632</sup> Harland, *Associations*, 125.

<sup>633</sup> Harland, ‘Spheres of Contention’, 53.

<sup>634</sup> For honouring of powerful individuals or authorities, see Harland, *Associations*, 106-8.

<sup>635</sup> These could be powerful or wealthy citizens in the social spectrum in between the common people and the emperors. These could be provincial officials or wealthy, elite individuals and groups who have aristocratic connections..

<sup>636</sup> Harland, *Associations*, 97. Harland devotes a chapter to the participation in the social system of benefaction: 89-112.

<sup>637</sup> *Or.* 31.16 (Cohoon and Crosby, LCL); Harland, *Associations*, 100.

<sup>638</sup> Seland, see 112.

could serve as benefactors and patrons of several clubs. They in turn could draw upon the loyalty of the members if needed.’<sup>639</sup> Honour rendered to a patron would encourage benefaction to the client. Harland goes a step further,

Failure to fittingly honor a benefactor resulted in shame (*aischynē*), and this might be viewed as analogous to impiety (*asebeia*) toward the gods (the ultimate benefactors), as Dio Chrysostom suggests (cf. *Orations* 31.57, 65, 80-81, 157). Correspondingly, failure of the upper classes to provide appropriate benefactions was a threat to the position and status they strove to maintain within society. In this sense, benefaction became a duty or obligation, not simply a voluntary action.<sup>640</sup>

The ultimate favour would, of course, come from the emperors and deities. Some ways to seek imperial favour by associations would be through sacrifices to imperial deities and an accompanying banquet, the erection of statues and monuments with inscriptions of honour, the dedication of structures to the emperors or imperial gods, and participating officially in the imperial cult. Harland notes the importance of cooperation as an association to seek the benefaction that would more easily accrue to a group than to an individual.<sup>641</sup> These have implications for Jesus-followers living in the Graeco-Roman world. How does one negotiate between imperial worship that forms an inherent part of the social system and one’s livelihood, and one’s loyalty to Jesus? Jezebel, the wayward prophetess is, as I will posit, is taking on roles both in a Christian and a secular guild. Her syncretistic practices are the object of polemic in Revelation.

### **5. Eating Idol-Food and Sexual Immorality in Christian Literature**

Some decades before the writing of the Apocalypse, the apostle Paul addressed the issue of eating idol-food in the church of Corinth in 1 Cor 8 and 10:1-11:1. Besides these two passages that touch on the issue of participating in social/cultic meals involving idol-food, 1 Cor 5:9-11 possibly also refers in part to a context of a social meal as well. Verse 11 warns against ‘eating’ (συνεσθίω) with a professed ‘brother’ (ἀδελφός) who is sexually immoral, greedy, an idolater, drunkard, slanderer and swindler. Notably, the first four out of the six traits (rearranged in my list) can relate

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<sup>639</sup> Seland, 112.

<sup>640</sup> Harland, *Associations*, 98

<sup>641</sup> Harland, *Associations*, 100.

to vices of idolatrous feasts. Based on a close association between the symposium and sexual immorality in the Graeco-Roman dining culture, Fotopolous concludes that Paul warns against sexual immorality in the context of dining in 1 Cor 10:7-8.<sup>642</sup> He also interprets παίζειν in 1 Cor 10:7 to mean indulging in sexual immorality. He writes,

The συνπόσιον portion of the meal, which frequently involved intoxication and sexual play with flute girls, prostitutes or boyish wine-servers, stands as a logical context for Corinthian πορνεία in association with the consumption of sacrificial food.

Not excluding contextual connotations added to παίζειν that refer to sexual play, I suggest that there might also be dances within the entertainment part of symposiums, as well as enactments of mythic enactment. These could be part of the act παίζειν (to dance, play a game, an instrument, or amorously, to jest or sport<sup>643</sup>). For example, in the associations of Dionysos, sacred drama is played out in meal contexts and dancing is a common part of Dionysiac ritual.<sup>644</sup> Xenophon's *Symposium* 9.2-7 describes a pantomime in which a pair played the lovers Dionysus and Ariadne in erotic kisses in dance and acting. The final scene depicts them 'in each others' embrace and obviously leaving for the bridal couch' (περιβεβληκότας τε ἀλλήλους; *Symp.* 9.7).<sup>645</sup> The bridal chamber and the sexual frolic to happen are announced to start the play:

Gentlemen, Ariadne will now enter the chamber set apart for her and Dionysus; after that, Dionysus, a little flushed with wine drunk at a banquet of the gods, will come to join her; and then they will disport (*paizō*) themselves together.<sup>646</sup>

Ὁ ἄνδρες, Ἀριάδνη εἴσεισιν εἰς τὸν ἑαυτῆς τε καὶ Διονύσου θάλαμον· μετὰ δὲ τοῦθ' ἥξει Διόνυσος ὑποπεπωκὼς παρὰ θεοῖς καὶ εἴσεισι πρὸς αὐτήν, ἔπειτα παιξοῦνται πρὸς ἀλλήλους.

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<sup>642</sup> Evidence dealt with in Fotopolous, ch. 6.

<sup>643</sup> LSJ, 1288.

<sup>644</sup> Smith, 118.

<sup>645</sup> Smith, 118.

<sup>646</sup> *Symp.* 9.2 (Todd, LCL)

In extant statutes of Iobakchoi from Athens dated second to third century C.E.,<sup>647</sup> we see a sacred drama enacted at the στιβάς,<sup>648</sup> which is part of some feasts or festivals of the association.

The Iobakchoi shall meet on the ninth of each month, / and at the yearly festivals, at the Bakcheia, / and on any extraordinary feast of the god; / (45) and each one is to speak or act or try to distinguish himself, / and pay a fixed monthly / contribution for the wine. / If anyone does not fulfill his obligation, he shall be excluded from the *stibas*.<sup>649</sup>

| συνίτωσαν δὲ οἱ ἰόβακχοι τὰς τε ἐνά|τας καὶ τὰς ἀμφιετηρίδας  
καὶ Βακχεῖ|α καὶ εἴ τις πρόσκαιρος ἑορτὴ τοῦ θεοῦ, | ἕκαστος ἢ  
λέγων ἢ ποιῶν ἢ φιλοτε|λούμενος, καταβάλλων μηνιαίαν | τὴν  
ὀρισθεῖσαν εἰς τὸν οἶνον φοράν· | ἐὰν δὲ μὴ πληροῖ, εἰργέσθω  
τῆς στιβά|δος...<sup>650</sup>

Later in the text:

No one is allowed to sing, / cheer, or applaud at the *stibas*, but with / (65) all good order and quietness / they shall speak and act their allotted parts under the direction of / the priest or the archibakchos. None / of the Iobakchos who has not contributed / for the ninth-day feasts and the yearly festivals / (70) shall enter the *stibas* until / it is determined for him by the priest / that he either pay the dues or enter.<sup>651</sup>

| οὐδενὶ δὲ ἐξέσται ἐν τῇ στιβάδι οὔτε ᾄσαι | οὔτε θορυβῆσαι  
οὔτε κροτῆσαι, μετὰ δὲ | πάσης εὐκοσμίας καὶ ἡσυχίας τοὺς  
μερι|μοὺς λέγειν καὶ ποιεῖν, προστάσσοντος | τοῦ ἱερέως ἢ τοῦ  
ἀρχιβάκχου. μηδενὶ | ἐξέστω τῶν ἰοβάκχων τῶν μὴ  
συντελε|σάντων εἰς τε τὰς ἐνάτας καὶ ἀμφιετηρί|δας  
εἰσέρχεσθαι εἰς τὴν στιβάδα μέχρις ἂν | ἐπικριθῇ αὐτῷ ὑπὸ τῶν  
ἱερέων ἢ ἀποδοῦ|ναι αὐτὸν ἢ ἰσέρχεσθαι.<sup>652</sup>

<sup>647</sup> See translation of text in Smith, 129; Greek text: Franciszek Sokolowski (ed.), *Lois sacrées des cités grecques* (École française d'Athènes 18; Paris: E. de Boccard, 1969), 95-100, no. 51.

Edition:

Published: Paris : E. de Boccard, 1969.

Other Author(s): Sokolowski, Franciszek.

<sup>648</sup> The term 'στιβάς' refers to 'a bed of straw, rushes or leaves'. LSJ, 1645.

<sup>649</sup> Smith, 129.

<sup>650</sup> SIG 3.1109.

<sup>651</sup> Smith, 130.

<sup>652</sup> SIG 3.1109.

Smith equates banquet meetings of Dionysus with the σπιβάς.<sup>653</sup> From the text it seems that the σπιβάς is a part of some feasts or festivals conducted monthly, yearly or during special occasions (43-45) which include some kind of sacred drama that members allocated roles are obligated to perform, as directed by the priest or ἄρχιβάκχος (65-66). In this ‘play’, however, rules stipulated by the association regulate disorderly conduct. Fighting, using abusive language and occupying the ‘couch’ (κλισίαν) of another during the σπιβάς are not allowed (73-75, 84). The ‘κλισία’ can refer to the dining couch used in banquets.<sup>654</sup> As such, the sacred drama (to speak and act allocated parts, 45-48, 66; roles played, such as Dionysus, Kore, Palaimon, Aphrodite and Proteurythmos, 124-25) are conducted in a meal setting. The drama forms an important part of the σπιβάς, apart from the sermon, libation and sacrifice (115, 118-19). Smith notes that dramatic presentations were not uncommon in symposium.<sup>655</sup> Thus, it seems likely that the παίξειν in 1 Cor 10:7, which happens in meal contexts, could be read in light of the dances, drama and even sexual play in some symposiums.

Admonishments against vices associated with feasting occur quite frequently in the NT. Besides the elaborate discussion in 1 Cor 8:1-13 and 10:1-33, other passages, such as Rom 13:13; 14:2, 2 Cor 12:21, Gal 5:19, 21, Eph 5:5, 18 and 1 Pet 4:3 appear to speak on a similar matter of feasting with references to the following:

- (i) orgies, drunkenness, sexual immorality, debauchery (Rom 13.13); also vegetarian diet for those weak in conscience/faith, possibly to avoid eating sacrificial meat unknowingly (Rom 14:2; cf. 1 Cor 8:13).
- (ii) sexual immorality, shameful deeds done in darkness (Eph 5:5), orgies, drunkenness, sexual immorality and debauchery (Eph 5:18)
- (iii) impurity, sexual sin, debauchery (2 Cor 12:21)
- (iv) sexual immorality, impurity, debauchery, drunkenness, orgies (Gal 5:19, 21)
- (v) debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry (1Pet 4:3)

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<sup>653</sup> Smith, 113.

<sup>654</sup> LSJ, 961.

<sup>655</sup> Smith, 117.

In all these verses, debauchery and sexual immorality go together hand in hand. The lists of vices appear to reflect licentiousness during feasts, with their drinking-parties, and likely as part of festivals, in which plenty of sacrificial meat is available. In some cases, the vices listed were in connection with feasts with sacrificial meat (1 Pet 4:3). The discussion of the ‘weak’ (ἀσθενής) conscience (see similar issues in 1 Cor 8:7-11; 10:28-29) and a vegetarian diet in Rom 14:2 (cf. 1 Cor 8:12) likely indicates the avoidance of meat sacrificed to idols by some Christians. Such meat was commonplace in feasts and the marketplace (cf. 1 Cor 10:25, 28). It is evident that some members of the church in Corinth participated in pagan feasts in temples involving sacrifices and libations (1 Cor 10:21). Phil 3:19 tells us of some, whose ‘stomach’ (κοιλία) was their god, and who indulged in shameful things. Likewise in 1 Cor 6:13a, Paul seems to be warning against gluttony (the desires of the ‘stomach’, κοιλία), which happens in meal contexts involving idol worship. The warning against sexual immorality follows in verse 13b. Though the relationship between gluttony and sexual immorality is not made clear in the passage, it is not hard to imagine prostitutes mingling with the diners in the συμπροσία as a context.

In the same way, drunkenness and sexual immorality surface together in Philo’s *Specialibus Legibus* 2.14.49-50<sup>656</sup> and his *Ebrietas* 24.95 of the first century C.E. Feasts and/or cultic festivals (especially in the latter passage<sup>657</sup>) appear to be the background of the revelry. The ‘contributions’ or ‘club subscriptions’ (*Ebr.* 6.20) pay

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<sup>656</sup> About the three body parts of a wicked man in a feast that Philo observes:

with the first, he blurts out matters of secrecy which call for silence, while in his greed he fills the second with viands unlimited and strong drink in great quantities, and as for the third, he misuses them for abominable lusts and forms of intercourse forbidden by all laws. He not only attacks in his fury the marriages-beds of others, but even plays the pederast and forces the male type of nature to debase and convert itself into the feminine form, just to indulge a polluted and accursed passion.

δι’ ἧς μὲν γὰρ ἐκλαλεῖ τὰ ἀπόρρητα καὶ ἡσυχαστέα, τὴν δὲ ἀκράτου πολλοῦ καὶ ἐδεσμάτων ἀμέτρων ἀναπλήρῃσιν ὑπὸ λαιμαργίας, τοῖς δὲ καταχῆται προὸς ἐκνομωτάτους οἷστρους καὶ μίξεις ἀθέσμους, οὐ μόνον ἀλλοτρίοις γάμοις ἐπιμεμηνώς, ἀλλὰ καὶ παιδευαστῶν καὶ βιαζόμενος τὸν ἄρρενα τῆς φύσεως χαρακτῆρα παρακόπτειν καὶ μεταβάλλειν εἰς γυναικόμορφον ἰδέαν τοῦ μεμιασμένῳ καὶ ἐπαράτῳ πάθει χαρίσασθαι.

Colson and Wither, LCL):

<sup>657</sup> The idolatrous revelry of Exod 32 is again alluded there.



for entertainment such as the eating and drinking bouts (*Ebr.* 24.95).<sup>658</sup> Men of ‘folly’ were seen

to compete in the arena of wine bibbing and every day exercising themselves and contending in the contests of gluttony. The contributions they make are supposed to be for a profitable purpose, but they are actually mulcting themselves in everything, in money, body and soul. Their substance they diminish by the actual payments, their bodily powers they shatter and enfeeble by the delicate living, and by excessive indulgence in food they deluge their souls as with a winter torrent and submerge them perforce in the depths.

τοὺς ἐπαποδυομένους πολυοινία καὶ καθ’ ἑκάστην ἡμέραν γυμναζομένους καὶ ἀθλοῦντας τοὺς ἐπ’ ἀπληστίᾳ γαστρὸς ἄθλους ἔστι συμβολὰς μὲν ὥς ἐπὶ τινι τῶν λυσιτελῶν εἰσφέροντας, ζημιουμένους δὲ πάντα, χρήματα, σώματα, ψυχάς· τὰ μὲν γὰρ εἰσφέροντες μειοῦσι τὴν οὐσίαν, τῶν δὲ σωμάτων διὰ τὸ ἀβροδίαιτον κατακλῶσι καὶ θρύπτουσι τὰς δυνάμεις, τὰς δὲ ψυχὰς ποταμοῦ χειμάρρου τρόπον ἀμετρίᾳ τροφῶν ἐπικλύζοντες εἰς βυθὸν ἀναγκάζουσι δύεσθαι.<sup>659</sup>

Drunkenness and gluttony was a result of the membership in such clubs. The fact that ‘feasts and gatherings were typical traits of the Greco-Roman clubs and associations’<sup>660</sup> aggravates the matter. In Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, intoxication from wine (5:18), gluttony (5:5), sexual immorality (5:3, 5), and perhaps, the ‘fruitless deeds of darkness’ (τὰ ἔργα τὰ ἄκαρπα τοῦ σκούτου; 5:11-12) may be the result of uncut ties with the pagan revelry. The context may be a feast in which wine in abundance, revelry and erotic play happen.<sup>661</sup> A biennial festival of Dionysus in many parts of Greece and in Asia Minor

took place at night time, shared only by women and girls. The women wearing Bacchic costume, goat-skins and with dishevelled hair, and carrying in their hands the thyrsus and tambourine, performed on the heights near their abode all kinds of sacrifices and dances, which, thanks to the wine which was otherwise only rarely drunk, very soon degenerated into wild orgies...<sup>662</sup>

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<sup>658</sup> Seland, 119.

<sup>659</sup> *Ebr.* 6.22 (Colson, LCL).

<sup>660</sup> Seland, 114.

<sup>661</sup> For erotic festivals, see Licht, 110-18.

<sup>662</sup> Licht, 110.

According to Licht, many festivals of Artemis involved orgiastic dances.<sup>663</sup> These activities shaped one's lifestyle, and residual influence could have remained after conversion to Christianity (Eph 4:22). Tertullian complains that Christians continued to observe the Matronalia and Saturnalia, and engaged in gift-giving, gambling, feasting, and rowdiness (*Idol*.14).<sup>664</sup>

The pressing nature of idolatrous and adulterous feasts, festivities and communal meals is perhaps reflected in the counteraction of the 'apostolic decree' (Acts 15:20, 29). Gentiles are admonished to turn away from (i) things defiled by idols (v. 20), presumably including idol-food, (ii) from blood, (iii) 'strangled' (πνικτός) animals, and (iv) from sexual immorality. Leaving aside the debatable significance of strangled animals and the blood,<sup>665</sup> we see the eating of idol-food and sexual immorality as paired issues here. Witherington interprets the eating of idol-food, perhaps, in the dining rooms within the temple precinct after animal sacrifice is made.<sup>666</sup> Yarbro Collins elaborates on the context of involving sacrificial meat:

Only the wealthy in the first century had dining rooms in which to entertain their friends. The vast majority played host at sacred tables, that is, in dining rooms opening off the stoas that ran around sacral areas, on stone couches covered by arbors or on leaves or straw sheltered by a tent or canopy on the temple grounds.<sup>667</sup>

She adds that social meals could be in the context of 'Gentile clubs, which virtually always had a patron deity'.<sup>668</sup> The eating of idol-food in the temple is disallowed by Paul in 1 Cor 8:10. Paul's prohibition is an indictment against having anything to do with a sacrificial context, not only involving a victim sacrificed to idols but also in relation to libation offerings or toasting to deities (8:9-10; 10:14-22). This incurs the jealousy of God (10:22), and is a definite 'no'. But Paul allows eating sacrificial meat bought from the market in the homes of others when no objections are raised by the hosts (10:25-29). The author of Revelation similarly guards against the dual

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<sup>663</sup> Licht, 116.

<sup>664</sup> Valerie M. Warrior, *Roman Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 71.

<sup>665</sup> These were possibly related to the matter of sacrifice as well. For various views, see A. J. M. Wedderburn, 'The 'Apostolic Decree': Tradition and Redaction', *NovT* 35 (1993): 362-89.

<sup>666</sup> Ben Witherington III, 'Not so Idle Thoughts about *EIDOLOTHUTON*', *TynBul* 44.1 (1993): 242-46 and n. 22.

<sup>667</sup> Yarbro Collins, 'Insiders and Outsiders', 213.

<sup>668</sup> Yarbro Collins, 'Insiders and Outsiders', 213.

problem of eating idol-food and sexual immorality—the two issues of concern in 1 Corinthians.<sup>669</sup> The Nicolaitans (Rev 2:6, 15), adherents to Balaam’s teaching (2:14) and followers of the prophetess ‘Jezebel’ (2:20) are chided for the paired offence. But unlike Paul, the author of Revelation does not qualify for which contexts the eating of sacrificial meat is prohibited. He could have meant ‘in all circumstances’. Being engaged in a polemic against offenders, his stance is necessarily harsh.

In the second century, the *Didache* 6 takes up again a strict prohibition against food offered to idols, attributing such food to the worship of dead gods (ἀπὸ δὲ τοῦ εἰδωλοθύτου λίαν πρόσεχε· λατρεία γάρ ἐστι θεῶν νεκρῶν.) ‘Fornication’ occurs in a list of other vices in 2.2; 3.3 and 5.1.<sup>670</sup> In 5.1, fornication is mentioned together with idolatry. Justin Martyr’s *Dialogue with Trypho* 35 reveals that some Christians, who confessed Christ, ate meat sacrificed to idols, believing that such an act was of no consequence. Irenaeus (*Haer.* 6.5.3) describes the self-proclaimed Valentinians, who

make no scruple about eating meats offered in sacrifice to idols, imagining that they can in this way contract no defilement. Then, again, at every heathen festival celebrated in honour of the idols, these men are the first to assemble...<sup>671</sup>

idolothyta indifferenter manducant, nihil inquinari ab his putantes, et in omnem diem festum ethnicorum pro uoluntate in honorem idolorum factum primi conueniunt...<sup>672</sup>

Moreover, they indoctrinate women, have sexual intercourse with them, and sometimes impregnate them. Some have seduced and even broken up marriages of the women they passionately love, and subsequently contract marriages with them. Hippolytus also writes of promiscuous relationships perpetuated by followers of Simon Magus who are depicted to be involved in pagan worship.<sup>673</sup> They

celebrate magical rites, and resort to incantations. And (they profess to) transmit both love-spells and charms, and the demons said to be senders of dreams, for the purpose of distracting whomsoever they please. But they also employ those denominated Paredroi. “And they

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<sup>669</sup> For suggestions that the prohibitions were made in relation to the Apostolic Decree, see Yarbro Collins, ‘Insiders and Outsiders’, 212.

<sup>670</sup> Cf. Newton, 180.

<sup>671</sup> *ANF* 1:531.

<sup>672</sup> Rousseau and Doutreleau (eds.), 95-96.

<sup>673</sup> *Haer.* 6.14.

have an image of Simon (fashioned) into the figure of Jupiter, and (an image) of Helen in the form of Minerva; and they pay adoration to these.”<sup>674</sup>

ἐπιτελοῦσι καὶ ἐπαοιδαῖς <Χρῶνται>, φίλτρα τε καὶ ἀγώγιμα (κ)αὶ τοὺς λεγομένους ὄνειροπόμπους δαίμονας/ ἐπιπέμπουσι πρὸς τὸ ταρασσεῖν οὓς βούλονται· ἀλλὰ καὶ τοὺς λεγμένους παρέδρους ἀσκοῦσιν. εἰκόνα τε τοῦ Σίμωνος ἔχουσιν εἰς Διὸς μορφήν καὶ τῆς Ἑλένης ἐν μορφῇ Ἀθηνᾶς, καὶ ταύτας προσκυνοῦσι.<sup>675</sup>

It seems that eating idol-food and sexual immorality were not uncommon or illegitimate in circles of Christianity condemned by the apostles and church fathers. There is a tendency in polemical writings to depict one's opponents in the worst light, but not everything that was written was necessarily exaggerated or fabricated. Christianity was not a monolithic phenomenon and there were liberal groups that were permissive towards sexual license and pagan involvement.

Another Christian author, Clement of Alexandria (*Paed.* 2.4) of the mid second to early third century C.E., writes out of concern against the excessive behaviours of Christians during feasts. His description allows us an idea of what could have gone on in social meals of his times.

Let revelry keep away from our rational entertainments, and foolish vigils, too, that revel in intemperance. For revelry is an inebriating pipe, the chain of an amatory bridge, that is, of sorrow. And let love, and intoxication, and senseless passions, be removed from our choir. Burlesque singing is the boon companion of drunkenness. A night spent over drink invites drunkenness, rouses lust, and is audacious in deeds of shame. For if people occupy their time with pipes, and psalteries, and choirs, and dances, and Egyptian clapping of hands, and such disorderly frivolities, they become quite immodest and intractable, beat on cymbals and drums, and make a noise on instruments of delusion; for plainly such a banquet, as seems to me, is a theatre of drunkenness. For the apostle decrees that, “putting off the works of darkness, we should put on the armour of light, walking honestly as in the day, not spending our time in rioting and drunkenness, in chambering and wantonness.”<sup>676</sup>

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<sup>674</sup> *Haer.* 6.15; *ANF* 5:146.

<sup>675</sup> Greek text: *Refutatio* VI.20.1 (= *Haer.* 6.15.1) in Miroslav Marcovich (ed.), *Hippolytus Refutatio Omnium Haeresium* (Patristische Texte und Studien 25; Berlin; New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1986), 228.

<sup>676</sup> *ANF* 2:248.

Ἀπέστω δὲ ἡμῖν τῆς λογικῆς εὐωχίας ὁ χῶμος, ἀλλὰ καὶ αἱ παννυχίδες αἱ μάταιοι ἐπὶ παροινία κομῶσαι· ὁ μὲν γάρ ἐστι μεθυστικός [αὐλὸς] ἄλυσ, ἐρωτικῆς σχεδιαστῆς ἀδημονίας, ὁ κῶμος· ἔρως δὲ καὶ μέθη, τὰ ἀλόγιστα πάθη, μακρὰν ἀπώκισται τοῦ ἡμεδαποῦ χοροῦ· σύγκωμος δὲ παροινία τίς ἐστὶν ἢ παννυχὶς [δὲ] ἐπὶ πότῳ, μέθης ἐκκλητικὴ καὶ συνοουσία ἐρεθιστικὴ, τόλμα αἰσροποιός. οἱ δὲ ἐν αὐλοῖς καὶ φαληρίδῃς καὶ χοροῖς καὶ ὀρχήμασιν καὶ κροτάλοις Αἰγυπτίων καὶ τοιαύταις ῥαθυμίας σάλοι ἄτακτοι καὶ ἀπρεπεῖς καὶ ἀπαίδευτοι χομιδῇ γίνονται ἂν κυμβάλοις καὶ τυμπάνοις ἐξηχούμενοι καὶ τοῖς τῆς ἀπάτης ὀργάνοις περιψοφούμενοι· ἀτεχνῶς γάρ, ὡς ἐμοὶ δοκεῖ, θέατρον μέθης τὸ τοιοῦτον γίνεται συμπόσιον. »ἀποθεμένους γὰρ ἡμᾶς τὰ ἔργα τοῦ σκότους ἐνδύσασθαι τὰ ὄπλα τοῦ πωτὸς« ἀξιοῖ ὁ ἀπόστολος, »ὥς ἐν ἡμέρᾳ εὐσημόνως περιπατοῦντας, μὴ κώμοις καὶ μέθαις, μὴ κοίταις καὶ ἀσελγείαις« σχολάζοντας.<sup>677</sup>

We see that wantonness and immodesty are set in the context of unruly singing, dancing and excessive drinking within a banquet. Rom 13:12-13, which Clement cites, sheds light on undesirable behaviours in the context of orgies and drunkenness.

In the third century, Tertullian in *On Fasting*<sup>678</sup> (*de ieiunio adversus psychicos*) admonishes ‘people and...bishops, even spiritual ones’ (*populo et episcopis, etiam spiritualibus*;<sup>679</sup> 16.3) against gluttony and, more secondarily, against sexual laxity. He was evidently writing to Christians, since he uses and alludes extensively both to the OT and the New. He describes their gluttony ironically (16.8):

For to you your belly is god, and your lungs a temple, and your paunch a sacrificial altar, and your cook the priest, and your fragrant smell the Holy Spirit, and your condiments spiritual gifts, and your belching prophecy.<sup>680</sup>

Deus enim tibi venter est, et pulmo templum, et aqualiculus altare, et sacerdos cocus, et sanctus spiritus nidor, et condimenta charismata, et ructus prophetia.<sup>681</sup>

He mocks them with the story of Esau’s exchange of birthright for soup (17.2-3),

<sup>677</sup> Clemens Alexandrinus, GCS, I.181-82.

<sup>678</sup> ANF 4:196-97.

<sup>679</sup> Quinti Septimii Florentis Tertulliani, *Quae Supersunt Omnia* (3 vols.; Franciscus Oehler, ed.; Leipzig, T.O. Weigel, 1853-1854), I.876.

<sup>680</sup> ANF 4:197.

<sup>681</sup> Latin: Oehler (ed.), I.877.

If I offer you a paltry lentile dyed red..., forthwith you will sell all your “primacies:” with you “love” shows its fervour in sauce-pans, “faith” its warmth in kitchens, “hope” its anchorage in waiters; but of greater account is “love,” because that is the means whereby your young men sleep with their sisters! Appendages, as we all know, of appetite are lasciviousness and voluptuousness. Which alliance the apostle withal was aware of; and hence, after premising, “Not in drunkenness and revels,” he adjoined, “nor in couches and lusts.”<sup>682</sup>

Si tibi lenticulam...obtulero, statim totos primatus tuos vendes; apud te agape in caccabis fervet, fides in culinis calet, spes in ferculis iacet. Sed maioris est agape, quia per hanc adulescentes tui cum sororibus dormiunt. Appendices scilicet gulae lascivia atque luxuria est. Quam societatem et apostolus sciens, cum praemisisset, Non in ebrietatibus nec in comensationibus, adiunxit, Nec in cubilibus et libidinibus.<sup>683</sup>

Their gluttony is set in the context of reclining feasts (the use of ‘couches’ (*cubilia*) and the associated drinking parties. They were said to be ‘frequent in banqueting, more sumptuous in catering, more learned in cups’ (*nisi convivandi frequentior, nisi obsonandi pollucibilior, nisi calicibus instructor*;<sup>684</sup> 17.4).

As late as the sixth century, Philoxenus of Mabbôgh lashes out in a long treatise against gluttony. Gluttony and other vices at times took place in feasts with sacrifices to idols and tables set before idols. Philoxenus applies the saying ‘The people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play’ (10th discourse)<sup>685</sup> in the context of pagan revelry. This description clearly alludes to 1 Cor 10:7 and Exod 32:6. The latter verse is specifically set in the context of pagan revelry in the worship of a golden calf made to represent the God of Israel (Exod. 32:4-6).<sup>686</sup>

The above survey does not include more severe allegations of Christian assemblies that were accused of worshipping an ass head and holding nocturnal meetings involving infant sacrifice, banquets involving drunkenness and acts of lusts.<sup>687</sup> The accusations were refuted by the Christian Minucius Felix of the third

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<sup>682</sup> ANF 4:197-98.

<sup>683</sup> Latin: Oehler (ed.), I.877.

<sup>684</sup> Latin: Oehler (ed.), I.878.

<sup>685</sup> Philoxenus, *Discourses of Philoxenus, Bishop of Mabbôgh, A.D. 485-519*, vol. 2 (trans. E.A. Wallis Budge Royal Society of Literature; London: Asher & Co., 1894), 388. (Edited from Syriac Mss. of the 6th and 7th centuries.)

<sup>686</sup> Newton, 328.

<sup>687</sup> Min. Fel., *Oct.* 8-9; Stephen Benko, ‘Pagan Criticism of Christianity during the First Two Centuries A.D’, *ANRW* II, 23.2 (1980): 1055-118, see 1082-83.

century C.E.<sup>688</sup> Tertullian (155- ca. 220 C.E.)<sup>689</sup> too records a quite common accusation against Christians on banquets that involved sexual immorality, infant sacrifice and cannibalism.<sup>690</sup> As with Minucius, he refutes these allegations as groundless for a Christian community, but says that these practices were common in pagan worship.<sup>691</sup> However, Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150-215 C.E.)<sup>692</sup> ascribes similar practices to the Carpocratians.<sup>693</sup> Eusebius (263-339/340 C.E.)<sup>694</sup> reports that slaves in Lyons in 177 C.E. testify under threat of torture against their Christian masters for their illicit intercourses and Thyestean banquets.<sup>695</sup> Epiphanius (ca. 315-403 C.E.)<sup>696</sup> describes an even more lewd gathering of the Stratiotics and Phibionites (also called Zacchaeans and Barbelites), in which there was the eating of sperm and menstrual emissions taken to represent the body and blood of Christ, and the cannibalism of unborn foetuses of women who happen to be impregnated in the sexual encounters of their meetings.<sup>697</sup>

## **6. Eating Idol-Food and Sexual Immorality in Rev 2:14-15 and 2:20-24**

In Revelation, we see various factions or groups involved in eating idol-food and committing sexual immorality. The groups holding the teaching of ‘Jezebel’ and of Balaam, and the Nicolaitans seem to belong, generally speaking, to the same tendency which promoted the pair of offences (Rev 2:14-15, 20). The author explicitly refers to only one leader, ‘Jezebel’ (2:20). Unlike ‘Jezebel’ whom the author was in confrontation with, ‘Balaam’ appears to be less of an active personality in the church of Pergamum, as only his ‘teaching’ (διδασκί) is referred to (2:14).

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<sup>688</sup> See *Oct.* 28-31.

<sup>689</sup> Frances Young, Lewis Ayres, Andrew Louth, *The Cambridge History of Early Christian Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), xxii.

<sup>690</sup> *Apol.* 7.

<sup>691</sup> E.g., *Apol.* 8-9.

<sup>692</sup> Young, xxii.

<sup>693</sup> *Strom.* 3.2.10.

<sup>694</sup> Young, xxii.

<sup>695</sup> Euseb., *Eccl. Hist.* 5.1.14f; cf. Benko, ‘Pagan Criticism’, 1084.

<sup>696</sup> Jon F. Dechow, *Dogma and Mysticism in Early Christianity: Epiphanius of Cyprus and the Legacy of Origen* (Patristic Monograph Series 13; Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1988), 10.

<sup>697</sup> *Pan.* 26.4. Benko, ‘Pagan Criticism’, 1085-86; also Stephen Benko, ‘The Libertine Gnostic Sect of the Phibionites according to Epiphanius’, *VC* 21 (1967): 103-19.

## 6.1 The self-professed prophetess 'Jezebel'

'Jezebel' is called after an OT queen, notorious for leading Israelites astray to idolatry (1 Kgs 16:31; 18:19; 2 Kgs 9:22).<sup>698</sup> Queen Jezebel hosts the prophets of Baal and Asherah (850 of them) at her table (1 Kings 18:19). Such feasts that involved close to a thousand guests would have been very big and lavish events. Jezebel appears in this manner as a patroness of the cults of Baal and Asherah. The prophetess 'Jezebel' in Thyatira, named after her, must have been a known figure to the churches in Asia Minor, as her punishment and that of her followers would be news to 'all the churches' (2:23). Aune suggests that 'Jezebel' 'was a patroness or hostess of one of the house churches that made up the Christian community at Thyatira'.<sup>699</sup> Her role as a leader of a house church is conceivable given her title as a 'prophetess' (προφήτη). Harland suggests that 'Jezebel' could have been 'a leader or benefactor of a Nicolaitan group' and that she

was a woman of relatively high standing in Thyatira (possibly a Julia Severa-type figure) who took honouring the emperors and other imperial representatives, as well as full participation in the economic life of the city as appropriate activities for members of the Christian groups with whom she affiliated.<sup>700</sup>

Though it is not entirely clear that 'Jezebel' and the Nicolaitans belonged to the same group, Jezebel's wealth as a patroness or leader of a kind of voluntary association makes sense. Her permissive attitude towards pagan culture is evident in her unscrupulous attitude towards the eating sacrificial meat and sexual excess.

A further clue to Jezebel's role as an important leader in an ἐκκλησία or in a guild is her position as a 'mother' figure. She apparently has 'children' (τέκνα). These 'children' within her circles were threatened with death if they were unrepentant (2:22). It is *unlikely* that these were her natural children and were punished for being that, but were 'children' adhering to her teaching and committing the sort of offences that demanded death in the author's eyes.<sup>701</sup> Familial

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<sup>698</sup> See Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 203.

<sup>699</sup> Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 203.

<sup>700</sup> Harland, *Associations*, 260.

<sup>701</sup> Aune interprets 'her children' as her disciples or members of her prophetic circles. Aune, 206.



relationships were used to denote fellow-members in ‘a significant number of associations’ *not* comprising of actual families.<sup>702</sup> Harland observes,

It is quite common for groups that were not actually related to express their gratitude toward benefactors or leaders with titles reflecting familial affection. Thus an all-female association of initiates of the Great Mother (Cybele) at Serdica in Thracia referred to its leader as “mother of the tree bearers,” and similar uses of “mother” (*mētēr*) or “father” (*patēr*), as well as “son” (*huios*), are attested within associations of various kinds elsewhere.<sup>703</sup>

He observes the common use of ‘parental metaphors’ in cities and associations of the Greek East, especially in Asia Minor. Familial relationships, including ‘father’ (πατήρ), ‘mother’ (μήτηρ), ‘son’ (υἱός), ‘daughter’ (θυγάτηρ), ‘foster-father’ (τροφεύς) and ‘foster-child’ (τρόφιμος) were common for benefactors or functionaries of ‘civic bodies and other organizations’.<sup>704</sup> A parental title expresses ‘honour, hierarchy, and/or belonging within the association of community, and it could also pertain to functional leadership roles (rather than mere honorifics) in certain cases’.<sup>705</sup> He wonders if ‘children’ were so called by the ‘mother’ or ‘father’ in such associations.<sup>706</sup> The familial relationships in Christian ἐκκλησίαι have been studied in detail by Wayne Meeks.<sup>707</sup> Here, I will just note a few things. Paul, in particular, claims authority as ‘father’ (πατήρ) over the congregation in Corinth against other guardians, and addresses them as ‘children’ (τέκνα; 1 Cor 4:14-15; 2 Cor 12:14; and Gal 4:19). The Second Letter of John may contain a close example to ‘Jezebel’ and her ‘children’ (Rev 2:23) in a female leader of a house church and her ‘children’ (τέκνα).<sup>708</sup> The letter is addressed to ‘the elect lady and her children’ (ἐκλεκτῇ κυρίᾳ καὶ τοῖς τέκνοις αὐτῆς) by John, the elder (verse 1). The elect

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<sup>702</sup> Harland, *Associations*, 31; see also μήτηρ and πατήρ in *collegia*, Wilson, 25-26; Kloppenborg, 26.

<sup>703</sup> Harland, *Associations*, 31, also 30-33 for details.

<sup>704</sup> Philip A. Harland, ‘Familial Dimensions of Group Identity (II): “Mothers” and “Fathers” in Associations and Synagogues of the Greek World’, *JSJ* 38 (2007): 57-79, see 65-66.

<sup>705</sup> Harland, ‘Familial Dimensions of Group Identity (II)’, abstract.

<sup>706</sup> Harland, *Associations*, 31.

<sup>707</sup> Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), see 85-95.

<sup>708</sup> Another female leader, Phoebe, besides being a διάκονος, is a προστάτις of an ἐκκλησία in Cenchrea (Rom 16.1). ‘Προστάτις’ is one of the titles of leaders in Greek associations. See Kloppenborg, 26.

lady<sup>709</sup> takes on the role of guardianship over her congregation, since it is to her that John writes to ensure her children were walking according to the truth, and not being deceived by false teachers (verses 4, 7-11). The motherly figure takes the role of a teacher.<sup>710</sup> The letter also mentions the greetings of an ‘elect sister’ (ἐκλεκτὴ κυρία) leading another congregation—her ‘children’ (τέκνα; verse 1 and 13). In 3 John, the elder refers to his congregation as ‘my children’ (τὰ ἐμός τέκνα; verse 4). ‘Jezebel’ and ‘her children’ make sense in the relationship of a female leader—a ‘prophetess’ (προφήτης)—and her congregation.

In addition to being a house church leader, ‘Jezebel’ could also have been a patroness of a guild or voluntary association in syncretistic association with pagan deities, as were common for guilds and associations of the day.<sup>711</sup> Given the unusually large number of influential trade guilds in Thyatira,<sup>712</sup> one asks if Jezebel’s group had belonged to such an association. Lydia was an example of a wealthy female merchant from Thyatira, who had played host to Paul. She sold expensive purple cloth, which was the colour of royalty (Acts 16:14). The text does not give us more details about Lydia as to whether she grew to a leadership position in the church, and whether as a new Christian convert she had continued to participate in the affairs of trade guilds which she, as a wealthy merchant, must have belonged.

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<sup>709</sup> The ‘elect lady’ (ἐκλεκτὴ κυρία) does not appear to be a proper name, since ἐκλεκτά as a name is unattested at that time. See Robert W. Yarbrough, *1-3 John* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Mich.: Baker Academic, 2008), 333-34. ‘Elect lady’ can be understood as a personification of a Christian congregation. Judith Lieu, *The Second and Third Epistles of John: History and Background* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986), 65-67; Stephen S. Smalley, *1,2,3 John* (WBC 51; Waco, Texas: Word, 1984), 318-19. But there are reasons to read it as a honorary title of a lady: John writes in a personal style to this lady and mentions specific situations to her congregation, as well as a wish to speak to her in person.

<sup>710</sup> The author of Revelation warns the Thyatiran church against the teaching of Jezebel; just as John, the elder, warns the elect lady against false teachers who might corrupt her congregation in (2 John 7-10).

<sup>711</sup> There were sibyls who prophesied in the Graeco-Roman world. H. W. Parke, *Sibyls and Sibylline Prophecy in Classical Antiquity* (McGing, ed.; London: Routledge: 1992), 125-51. The Delphic sibyl (called a προφήτις as one of her titles) serves the cult of Apollo, but it is not clear what specific cultic affiliation Jezebel has. For the Pythia and her oracles, see Michael Attyah Flower, *The Seer in Ancient Greece* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 215-39. In *Shepherd of Hermas* (visions I and II), the figure alluding to the Cumaen sibyl is used as a metaphor for the church. See Parke, 152-56. Some decades after the book of Revelation a Christian sect was founded by Montanus in Phrygia and it had exalted prophetesses, Priscilla and Maximilla, as leaders. Parke, 159. Interestingly, according to Epiph. *Pan.* 51.33, the church in Thyatira succumbed to Montanism some time between late second and late third centuries. Reidar Aasgaard, ‘Among Gentiles, Jews, and Christians: Formation of Christian Identity in Melito of Sardis’ in Ascough (ed.), 156-74, see 160.

<sup>712</sup> Hemer, 107.

Likewise, it is not difficult to see ‘Jezebel’ as a wealthy woman belonging to such a guild and taking a leadership role within it.<sup>713</sup> Her liberal stance towards sexual immorality and eating sacrificial meat, also adopted by her followers (Rev 2:20), would have been helpful, even necessary, if the context had been that of a secular guild.<sup>714</sup> Such a guild would invariably have involved cultic rituals honouring pagan and imperial deities. Such a liberal stance also enabled members of her association to be more socially adept than other Christians who had kept a piety code contrary to the general culture. One senses that Jezebel’s influence was partly due to her social status, wealth and her permissive stance towards fuller social integration. Jezebel’s esoteric teachings, the so-called ‘deep things of Satan’ (τὰ βάθη τοῦ σατανᾶ, 2:23), endorsed a social assimilation that allowed fornication and eating sacrificial meat. Such acts were part of the prevalent feasting culture as we have seen. The exclusive nature of a particular teaching of ‘Jezebel’ is evidenced in a smaller circle within the Thyatiran church that knew of it. The author admonished those who did not know the so-called ‘deep things of Satan’ (τὰ βάθη τοῦ σατανᾶ) to continue to hold on to what was right (2:24).

The apostle Paul does sometimes use ‘mystery’ terminology in his writings.<sup>715</sup> Paul adopts the term: the ‘deep things of God’ (τὰ βάθη τοῦ θεοῦ, 1 Cor 2:10).<sup>716</sup> Also, in the literary context of 1 Cor 2:4-12, he speaks of the ‘secret wisdom of God kept hidden’ (θεοῦ σοφίαν ἐν μυστηρίῳ τὴν ἀποκεκρυμμένην; 1 Cor 2:7) that is ‘revealed’ (ἀπεκάλυψεν) to the believers by the Spirit (2:10). The believers are depicted as stewards/administrators (οἰκονόμους) of the ‘mysteries of God’ (μυστηρίων θεοῦ; 1 Cor 4:1). The Christianity of the NT, unlike the pagan mysteries, was not sectarian nor exclusive only to initiates. Different from the universal message of Paul, we notice that the ‘deep things’ (τὰ βάθη) that ‘Jezebel’

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<sup>713</sup> We know she is influential at least in the church of Thyatira and that she has followers.

<sup>714</sup> Professional guilds besides having a common economic pursuit, social meals and pursuit of honour were among their purposes. John S. Kloppenborg, ‘Collegia and Thiasoi: Issues in Function, Taxonomy and Membership’, in Kloppenborg and Wilson (eds.), 16-30, see 19.

<sup>715</sup> Μυστήριον (Rom 11:25; 16:25; 1 Cor 2:1; 2:7; 13:2; 14:4; 15:51; Eph 1:9; 3:3-4, 9; 5:32; 6:19; 1 Col 1:26-27; 2:2; 4:3; 2 Thess 2:7; 1 Tim 3:9; 3:16; Rev 1:20; 10:7; 17:5, 7). For a discussion on the significance of the occurrences of mystery concepts in the New Testament, see Devon H. Wiens, ‘Mystery Concepts in Primitive Christianity and in its Environment’, in *ANRW* II, 23.2 (1980): 1248-84.

<sup>716</sup> For other occurrences of ‘βάθος’ in Christian literature and magical papyrus, see Aune, *Revelation* I-5, 207-8; Heikki Räisänen, ‘The Nicolaitans: Apoc. 2; Acta 6’, in *ANRW* II, 26.2 (1995): 1602-44, see 1621-22.

taught were reserved for an exclusive circle (Rev 2:24). If we follow Revelation's mapping of the dragon to Roman power, Jezebel's connection with 'Satan' (devil/dragon, 12:9) would indicate a close connection of her guild/association to imperial power. This is conceivable, since imperial honours were commonly performed in guilds and associations. Mysteries, pagan or imperial (§4 above), could take place within guilds/associations.<sup>717</sup> One is tempted to think that 'Jezebel' was perhaps, in one of her roles, a mystagogue of esoteric knowledge within her guild/association.<sup>718</sup> Initiated members in Jezebel's guild (including members of the Thyatiran church) would then be relegated to the camp of the 'beast (emperor)-worshippers' of Revelation (e.g., 13:4, 8).

Revelation was written for the ἐκκλησίαι in various cities of Asia Minor. The Christian churches were in themselves 'structured and organized' along the model of common guilds and voluntary associations of the day.<sup>719</sup> There is evidence that the Christian churches were seen as part of the many kinds of voluntary associations in the Graeco-Roman world. Pliny the Younger writes to Emperor Trajan of the gatherings of Christ-devotees

in terms familiar from religious activities of associations and confirms that they had obeyed his edict regarding meetings of associations (*hetaeriae*, sometimes a synonym for *collegia*; *Epistles* 10.96.7-8).<sup>720</sup>

There were comments on Christian groups as 'members of a cult society' (θιασῶται) or a 'secret association' (κοινωνία),<sup>721</sup> and Christianity as a 'new initiation rite' (καινὴν ταύτην τελετήν).<sup>722</sup> As membership in multiple associations

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<sup>717</sup> Cf. Harland, *Associations*, 128-32.

<sup>718</sup> Interesting, too, is that John in Revelation was perceived as a 'θεολόγος' by his near contemporaries, even though the title was ascribed to him fairly late in the manuscript tradition of the Apocalypse. The title θεολόγος has associations with Graeco-Roman pagan and imperial cult and mysteries. Brent observes that

the letters to the churches have the quality of the utterance of a mystagogue surrounded by the λυχνία and revealing the mysteries of the figure υἱὸν ἀνθρώπου in their midst in terms of such veiled imagery as white stones and hidden manna.

See Allen Brent, 'John as Theologos: The Imperial Mysteries and the Apocalypse', *JSNT* 75 (1999): 87-102; citation from 102.

<sup>719</sup> Wayne O. McCready, 'Ekklesia and Voluntary Associations', in Kloppenborg and Wilson (eds.), 59-73, see 69. Also, Meeks, 74-84.

<sup>720</sup> Harland, *Associations*, 210-11.

<sup>721</sup> Harland, *Associations*, 212.

<sup>722</sup> Lucian *Peregr.* 11; cf. Harland, *Associations*, 211.

was possible, Jezebel's guild/association perhaps overlapped in membership with the ἐκκλησία in Thyatira. Though one cannot be certain about Jezebel's group unless one can identify Jezebel's specific historical identity,<sup>723</sup> the above picture presented is, nonetheless, a conceivable one.

The author of Revelation lashes out against the sin of adultery committed by some with 'Jezebel' (2:21-22). Μοιχεύω could mean by definition from the Graeco-Roman perspective, a man committing adultery with a free married woman,<sup>724</sup> or any extra-marital affair from a stricter NT perspective.<sup>725</sup> A literal act of adultery in Rev 2:21-23 is possible<sup>726</sup> given 'Jezebel' and her followers' liberal stance on social behaviour and the general libertine culture. As we have seen, sexual flirtation was not uncommon during social meals that were indispensable to the activities of guilds/associations (see §§2 and 3 above). The punishment uttered by Jesus for the adulterers is severe and explicit—death. The κλίνη<sup>727</sup> which Jesus will cast 'Jezebel' upon could refer, ironically, not only to the banqueting couch where flirtation happens, but also to a funerary bier. The κλίνη by definition could mean either of the two.<sup>728</sup> Sexual acts on the banqueting couch are attested in artworks in the Graeco-

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<sup>723</sup> For various speculations on her identity, see Osborne, 156. Suggestions included the pagan prophetess sibyl Sambathe, whose shrine is outside the city of Thyatira, the seller of the purple cloth, Lydia who was from Thyatira (cf. Acts 16:4), and the wife of the leader of the Thyatiran church. But one just does not have further details to know exactly who she was.

Epiphanius (*Haer.* 49.3; 51.33) associates the prophetess Jezebel to the female prophets in the later Montanism which, according to him (*Pan.* 51.33.3-4), had succumbed the whole city of Thyatira. Susanna Elm, "'Pierced by Bronze Needles": Anti-Montanist Charges of Ritual Stigmatization in their Fourth-Century Context', *J ECS* 4 (1996): 409-39, see 431. How one should understand Jezebel as a prophetess in the development of the later sect of Montanism is unclear, and the study of this is impeded by the little evidence we have.

<sup>724</sup> This is according to *TDNT*, 4:732. See also Judith Ginsburg, *Representing Agrippina: Constructions of Female Power in the Early Roman Empire* (American Philology Association, ACS 50; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 122 and n. 61.

<sup>725</sup> *TDNT*, 4:733-34.

<sup>726</sup> Aune, 205; Osborne, 160; *TDNT*, 4:729-35. It appears that none of the word 'μοιχεύω' in the NT requires strictly a figurative usage. *TDNT*, 4:734-35. lists possible figurative usage: Matt 12:39; 16:4; Mark 8:38; Jas 4:4; Rev 2:2; but none of these needs to be necessarily so. Streete interprets the act here as rape, but I do not see a good reason for that. Gail Corrington Streete, *The Strange Woman: Power and Sex in the Bible* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 154.

<sup>727</sup> Many manuscripts including Sinaiticus has this. Alexandrinus has θυλακή (prison) instead. See Aune, *Revelation* 1-5, 198.

<sup>728</sup> See Jennifer M. S. Stager, "'Let No One Wonder at This Image': A Phoenician Funerary Stele in Athens, *Hesperia* 74 (2005): 427-449, see 432, n.22; Osborne, 159. Some have translated κλίνη as a 'sick bed'. There is no indication from the word itself that it refers to such, but the context does help to explain that it is a bed of suffering. Aune, *Revelation* 1-5, 205. For banqueting couch being referred to, see Harland, *Associations*, 310-11, n. 17.

Roman world;<sup>729</sup> at the same time, the author's intended pun on the κλίνη for the funeral context of 'her children' (2:23) is evident. Here, we observe an interesting connection between the threat of death for Jezebel's children and the unsympathetic murder of an OT queen, also called 'Jezebel' (after whom the prophetess is perhaps nicknamed), and her children (and of Ahab) in 2 Kings 9-10 (see ch. 8).<sup>730</sup> A total eradication of Queen Jezebel's children happened in line with the grossness of her errors, as was to happen to the prophetess and her 'children' in Revelation. Jezebel's fornication with some members of her association (her 'children' as in familial terms used in voluntary associations)<sup>731</sup> appears disturbing. But as was posited, her guild could have involved some kind of mysteries restricted to initiates. What proceeds within such meetings would be under the oath of secrecy, and sexual license then becomes a suspect.

Admittedly, the above scenario consists of some speculative deductions about 'Jezebel' and her group. But the scenario seems plausible in light of the operations of Graeco-Roman associations presented above. As a self-claimed 'prophetess' (προφῆτις; 2:20), 'Jezebel' must have been able to put on an act on two fronts. Her excessive libertine side could have been known only by a restricted few given access to her exclusive teaching. Her secret teaching associated with, perhaps, imperial authority (Satan/dragon) is seen to exhibit pagan syncretism and allows a kind of sexual permissiveness that fits in with the popular culture of the day. Her guild/association is seen to consist of some members from the Christian ἐκκλησία in Thyatira.<sup>732</sup>

## 6.2. Followers of Balaam's teachings and the Nicolaitans

We see two other groups within the church in Pergamum, which advocate the eating of sacrificial meat and sexual immorality (2:14-15):

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<sup>729</sup> See John Grimes Younger, *Sex in the Ancient World from A to Z* (London: Routledge, 2005), 311, etc.

<sup>730</sup> Osborne, 160.

<sup>731</sup> Though the text did not specify who the ones committing adultery with her were, they were likely 'her children' mentioned soon after. This reading would explain why 'her children' deserve death, a severe punishment.

<sup>732</sup> Adela Collins writes that 'Jezebel' could have encouraged Christian artisans to join Gentile associations because of their separation from Jewish craft associations. While this may be possible, it is not clear that Christian communities avoided the Jews in business or in social life. Yarbro Collins, 'Insiders and Outsiders', 213.

14 ἀλλ' ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ ὀλίγα, ὅτι ἔχεις ἐκεῖ κρατοῦντας τὴν διδαχὴν Βαλαάμ, ὃς ἐδίδασκεν τῷ Βαλὰκ βαλεῖν σκάνδαλον ἐνώπιον τῶν υἱῶν Ἰσραὴλ, φαγεῖν εἰδωλόθυτα καὶ πορνεῦσαι·

15 οὕτως ἔχεις καὶ σὺ κρατοῦντας τὴν διδαχὴν Νικολαϊτῶν ὁμοίως.

From the text, though the followers of the teaching of Balaam and the Nicolaitans were distinguishable groups, they held a similar teaching.<sup>733</sup> The 'οὕτως' (in this way / in the same way) and the καὶ (in the sense of 'also') in verse 15 indicate that John is talking about *another* group called the 'Nicolaitans'. But the 'οὕτως' and the 'ὁμοίως' (likewise/in the same way) in verse 15 also indicate that the two groups held a similar kind of teaching.<sup>734</sup> The 'Balaam' in verse 14 does not seem to be a contemporary person, since he is referred to only in connection with the teaching that goes back to Jewish tradition, in which Balaam had taught Balak, the king of Moab, to cast a stumbling block before the sons of Israel. The account on Balaam in Num 22-24 does not mention Balaam advising king Balak to set a trap for the Israelites, but Jewish tradition elaborated on the 'נִצַּח' (to advise) in Num 24:14 in a creative way that is different from the meaning of the biblical text.<sup>735</sup> In Num 24:14-20, Balaam advised Balak that the Israelites would one day defeat the city of the Moabites; but in the Jewish tradition, Balaam is said to advise Balak how Israel could be defeated through seduction to sexual sin and idolatry. Whatever the reason for this new reading of the biblical text,<sup>736</sup> Balaam is well-known in Jewish tradition for having hatched a plot to lure the Israelites into sin.<sup>737</sup> Balaam's scandalous advice

<sup>733</sup> Osborne (p. 145) sees verses 14-15 actually referring just to a single movement, the Nicolaitans, which adopts the traditions of Balaam. This view has its problems, since the 'Likewise you also have...' (οὕτως ἔχεις...) in verse 15 distinguishes the group from the one in verse 14.

<sup>734</sup> On the similar doctrines of both groups, see Räisänen, 1602-44.

<sup>735</sup> Aune, *Revelation* 1-5, 187. For the various texts, see G. Vermes, *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism: Haggadic Studies* (StPB; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1961), 162-64.

<sup>736</sup> This could be due to reading Num 24:14 and 14:25 together (both stating the departure of Balaam) and positing a cause-and-effect relationship with Num 25:1-3, in which Israelites fornicated with Moabite women, took part in sacrificial feasts, consuming idol-food, and worshipped the idols.

<sup>737</sup> See for example, Joseph. *A.J.* 4.129-30; Philo *Mos.* 1.294; *L.A.B.* 18:13, *b. Sanhedrin* 106a. Louis H. Feldman, 'Philo's Version of Balaam', *Henoch* 25 (2003): 301-19, see 314-15; also, Geza Vermes, *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism: Haggadic Studies* (Studia Post-Biblica; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1961), 162-64.

Some studies on Balaam in Jewish tradition apart those listed above: Michael S. Moore, *The Balaam Traditions: Their Character and Development* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990); John T. Greene, *Balaam and His Interpreters: A Hermeneutical History of the Balaam Traditions* (BJS; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992); John T. Greene, 'The Balaam Figure and Type Before, During, and After the Period of the Pseudepigrapha', in *JSP* 8 (1991): 67-110; Jay Braverman, 'Balaam in Rabbinic and

and the Israelites' resulting fornication with Moabite girls and participation in their sacrificial feasts of idols (Num 25:1-2)<sup>738</sup> fit the context of the perceived polemic in Revelation against (1) eating idol-food and (2) fornication (particularly, in the context of social/cultic meals).

Aune presents the contexts in which one could encounter idol-food in the Graeco-Roman world:

(1) participation in a sacral meal in a temple, (2) accepting sacrificial meat distributed during a public religious festival, (3) the practice of eating meat purchased at the marketplace that had originally been part of a pagan sacrifice..., or (4) the sacral meals shared by members of a club or association..., or *collegium*, a context in which Christians mingled with non-Christians.<sup>739</sup>

Of the four situations, social meals or feasts feature in (1) and (4). Situation (2) is related to festive celebration. The sacrificial meat received could have been consumed in social meals held in connection with a festival, either in a public context or at home. Similarly, meat bought from the market could likewise be consumed. 1 Cor 10:27-28 describes a social meal hosted at home, in which idol-food could be served. Since feasting was a common affair in the Graeco-Roman world, and happened in connection with a variety of celebratory and funerary events. The followers of Balaam's teaching could easily have consumed sacrificial meat in these above occasions. At the same time, sexual immorality could have occurred in the *συμπόσιον* following a meal. Under the influence of wine and the presence of flute girls, flirting and fornication were possible, as discussed above.

Besides Revelation, Balaam is also mentioned in two other NT texts: 2 Peter 2:15-16 and Jude 1:11. In 2 Peter 15, Balaam is not called the 'son of Beor' (e.g.,

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Early Christian Traditions', in Sidney B. Hoenig and Leon D. Stitskin (eds.), *Joshua Finkel Festchrift: In Honor of Dr Joshua Finkel* (New York: Yeshiva University Press, 1974), 41-50; Louis H. Feldman, 'Josephus' Portrait of Balaam', *SPhilo* 5 (1993): 48-83; C. T. R. Hayward, 'Balaam's Prophecies as Interpreted by Philo and the Aramaic Targums of the Pentateuch', in P. J. Harland and C. T. R. Hayward, *New Heaven and Earth: Prophecy and the Millennium: Essays in Honour of Anthony Gelston* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 19-36; Torrey Seland, 'Philo, Magic and Balaam: Neglected Aspects of Philo's Exposition of the Balaam Story', in John Fotopoulos (ed.), *The New Testament and Early Christian Literature in Greco-Roman Contexts: Studies in Honor of David E. Aune* (NovTSup 122; Leiden: Brill, 2006), 333-46;

<sup>738</sup> The Septuagint also describes the sacrificial feast (θύσιν; Num 25:2) of idols as the context of Israelites' sin.

<sup>739</sup> Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 186.



Num 22:5) as is in the OT, but the son of *Bosor*.<sup>740</sup> Could the author of 2 Peter have been referring to a recent person, who was the son of *Bosor*; or is there a word play on ‘בָּשָׂר’ (flesh)?<sup>741</sup> Alternatively, some have suggested that ‘Bosor’ is the place of Balaam’s origin.<sup>742</sup> Without further leads, one could not profit from speculating. Unlike the ‘Jezebel’ in Revelation, the texts do not indicate that the ‘Balaam’ in either 2 Peter, Jude or Revelation refer to a recent/contemporary prophet in the churches. There are reasons to think that the ‘Balaam’ in these NT texts is not a living figure, since only his ‘way’ (ὁδός), his ‘error’ (πλάνη) or ‘teaching’ (διδασχί) are referred to (2 Pet 2:15; Jude 11; Rev 2:14). In these passages, ‘Balaam’ appears as an OT type. In 2 Peter he appears as a type for the many false teachers within Christian communities. There, many prophets of old were compared to contemporary false teachers (2:1). Balaam is also remembered for his greed for gain using his prophetic power, and is described as one ‘who loved the wages of wickedness’ (ὃς μισθὸν ἀδικίας ἠγάπησεν; 2:15). Such greed is also a trait of false teachers who were compared to him (2:3). Similarly using Balaam as a type, Revelation highlights the lure of his erroneous teaching leading church members to eat idol-food and fornicate (2:14). We construed that in the context of Revelation sexual immorality happened in the context of social meals. In 2 Pet 2:13-15, feasting and sexual immorality are also seen to be the traits of the adherents to Balaam’s teaching. These consider ‘it a pleasure to revel in the daytime, being spots and blemishes, revelling in their pleasures’ (ἡδονὴν ἠγούμενοι τὴν ἐν ἡμέρᾳ τρυφήν, σπίλοι καὶ μῶμοι ἐντρυφῶντες ἐν ταῖς ἀπάταις αὐτῶν) while feasting with church members (‘ὑμῖν’, the addressed readers), ‘having eyes full of an adulterous woman’ (ὀφθαλμοὺς ἔχοντες μεστοὺς μοιχαλίδος)<sup>743</sup> and ‘insatiable for sin, enticing unsteady souls, having a heart trained in greed...’ (ἀκαταπούστους ἁμαρτίας, δελεάζοντες ψυχὰς ἀστηρίκτους, καρδίαν γεγυμνασμένην πλεονεξίας ἔχοντες; vv. 13-14). Feasts or banquets were the context for flirtation,

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<sup>740</sup> Textual evidence points to this as the preferred reading. See Gene L. Green, *Jude and Peter* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Mich.: Baker Academic, 2008), 289. For our purposes, it is not necessarily to go any further into textual criticism here.

<sup>741</sup> Robert E. Aldridge, ‘Peter and the “Two Ways”’, *VC* 53 (1999): 233-264, see 257.

<sup>742</sup> Green, 289.

<sup>743</sup> Or ‘with eyes full of longing for an adulteress’. Green, 281.

revelry and sexual immorality. Green elaborates on banquets as a setting for the sexual sins in these verses.<sup>744</sup>

Banquets (2 Pet. 2:13) were a legendary forum for such sexual enticement. Ovid's *Art of Love* describes the best venues where "women can be caught," including both the theatre and banquets, where wine flowed (1.229-52). Ovid vividly describes such seduction at a banquet in his book *Amores* (*Love Affairs*), where the seducer and the lover seek secret means to touch without being discovered by the woman's husband....<sup>745</sup>

Social meals are also contexts for Christian 'love-feasts' (ἀγάπαις),<sup>746</sup> in which the Eucharist is conducted. Such social meals coupled with the Eucharist is reflected in 1 Cor 11:20-21. Those holding to Balaam's indulgent teaching brought sexual immorality into the context of a Christian meal (cf. 2 Pet 2:13).<sup>747</sup> Similarly in the context of Jude, sexually immoral men (verse 4) were taunted as 'blemishes' (σπιλάδες) in the love-feasts (ἀγάπαις)<sup>748</sup> of the Christian community (verse 12). The primary attraction of Balaam's teaching in 1 Peter and Jude was the gratification of fleshly desires, including sexual desires. Similarly those holding the teaching of Balaam in Revelation were also castigated for their sexual sins. The gastronomical delight of feasts involving sacrificial meat was also an attraction (Rev 2:14). The false teachers appearing in 2 Peter, and the depraved men 'shepherding themselves' (ἐαυτοὺς ποιμαίνοντες) in Jude 12 were not rebuked for eating of pagan sacrifices in an explicit way, but their proud attitude and blasphemies against celestial beings, their disregard for authority (2:10, 12; Jude 8, 10) and return to the depraved ways of the world (2:18-19, 20-22), as well as their insatiable appetite for pleasure and gain (2:13-14; Jude 11), could allow us to imagine that they would not refuse delicacies offered to idols in their enormous appetite for pleasure. Being described as 'godless' (ἄσεβής; 2 Pet 2:5-6, 3:7; Jude 4, 15), they naturally would not have any scruples about partaking in pagan feasts. There appears to be an influx of false teachers

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<sup>744</sup> See the elaboration on Green, 280-81. On community meals in Jude, see Green, 93-95.

<sup>745</sup> Green, 281.

<sup>746</sup> It is interesting that some manuscripts (such as Alexandrinus and Vaticanus) have ἀγάπαις for ἀπάταις pleasures/dissipations in 2 Pet 2:13. For ἀπάταις to be translated as 'pleasures' instead of 'deceptions', see Green, 281.

<sup>747</sup> Green, 94.

<sup>748</sup> Though the NA27 chooses to read ἀγάπη here, we see that there are manuscripts reading ἀπάταις (e.g., Alexandrinus and Ephraemi Syri Rescriptus) for it as in 2 Pet 2:13.

advocating syncretistic behaviour with worldly practices into the Christian community in late first and early second century, who indulged without reserve in the pleasures of feasting and sex. The many guilds and associations (including the Christian ἐκκλησίαι), in which social meals were an important part of their activities, provided the setting for such indulgent and permissive teachings to proliferate. ‘Jezebel’, the adherents of Balaam’s teachings and the Nicolaitans were part of the trend.

We now move on to the Nicolaitans. As discussed (§6.2), the Nicolaitans in Rev 2:15 are associated closely with the adherents of Balaam’s teachings, mentioned in the preceding verse. They are also mentioned in relation to the church in Ephesus (Rev 2:6), but the group does not appear to be influential there. The Nicolaitans received the attention of church fathers, such as Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Hippolytus, Epiphanius, and others.<sup>749</sup> Except for Epiphanius, the above-named church fathers wrote between the last decades of the second and early decades of the third century. Irenaeus (*Haer.* 1.26.3) refers to the Nicolaitans as followers of Nicolas (one of the seven deacons in Acts 6:5) ‘who lead lives of unrestrained indulgence’ (Qui indiscrete uiuunt).<sup>750</sup> But Irenaeus appears to have no independent information about their activities except what is mentioned in the book of Revelation. Clement of Alexandria thinks that Nicolas was not himself advocating a liberal attitude towards fornication and indulgence in pleasure. It was the Nicolaitans who wrongly interpreted his words that ‘the flesh must be abused’<sup>751</sup> (παραχρήσασθαι τῇ σαρκὶ δεῖ; *Strom.* 3.4.25.7),<sup>752</sup> and claimed him as their authority for their permissive stance.<sup>753</sup> This stance is similar to a certain Gnostic idea of fighting pleasure by (indulging in) pleasure.<sup>754</sup> On the contrary, according to Clement, Nicolas was himself intent on ‘restraining the distracting passions’ (ἡ ἐγκράτεια τῶν περισπουδάζοντων ἡδονῶν) and that was what he meant by ‘abusing the flesh’

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<sup>749</sup> For sources, refer to É. Amann, ‘Nicolaites’, in É. Amann, A. Vacant, E. Mangenot (eds), *Dictionnaire Théologie Catholique* (Paris: Librairie Letouzey et Ané, 1931), vol. 11.1, 499-506; the reference for Hippol. *Philosophoumena* 7.36 in the dictionary article should be 7.24 instead.

<sup>750</sup> *ANF* 1:352; Latin text: Irénée de Lyon, *Contre Les Hérésies Livre I* (Adelin Rousseau and Louis Doutreleau, eds.; Tome II; Sources Chrétiennes 264; Paris: Cerf, 1979), 348.

<sup>751</sup> *ANF* 2:373.

<sup>752</sup> Clemens Alexandrinus, GCS, II.207.

<sup>753</sup> *Strom.* 2.20.118.

<sup>754</sup> *ANF* 2:373.

(παραχρησθαι τῇ σαρκὶ; *Strom.* 3.4.26.2).<sup>755</sup> Clement also defends Nicolas who was alleged to have invited apostles to marry his wife (3.4.25).<sup>756</sup> Tertullian (*Praescr.* 33.10), similarly reiterates information on the Nicolaitans from the book of Revelation: that they ‘eat things sacrificed to idols and commit fornication’ (*idolothyta edentes et stupra committentes iubetur*).<sup>757</sup> He notes that in his time there was another sort of Nicolaitans of the Gaiana (or Caiana) heresy,<sup>758</sup> on which he does not elaborate further. Hippolytus (*Haer.* 7.24), again, like Irenaeus, gives the view that Nicolas himself was advocating licentiousness. He taught ‘indifferency of both life and food’ (ἀδιαφορίαν βίου τε καὶ βρώσεως<sup>759</sup>) was a prevalent bad influence to heretical sects.<sup>760</sup> Epiphanius wrote the *Panarion* very much later in the last quarter of the fourth century.<sup>761</sup> He greatly expands on Nicolas/Nicolaus’ story of lapsing into conjugal relations with his wife (which he had wanted to avoid; 25.1) and becoming slanderous/blasphemous (26.6). In Epiphanius’ account, the vices of the Nicolaitans proliferated. While the promiscuity and fornication remain, the participants (in his words) ‘foul their assembly...with dirt from promiscuous fornication; and they eat and handle both human flesh and uncleanness’ (τὴν σύναξιν αὐτῶν ἐν αἰσχροτήτι πολυμιξίας φύροντες, ἔσθοντές τε καὶ παραπτόμενοι καὶ ἀνθρωπίνων σαρκῶν καὶ ἀκαθαρσιῶν; 26.3.3).<sup>762</sup> One does not encounter such a degree of foulness in earlier descriptions of the Nicolaitans. The degrading development of the sect could be explained with Eusebius’ comment that the Nicolaitans, mentioned in Revelation, had existed for ‘the shortest time’ (σμικρότατον...χρόνον; Euseb., *Hist. Eccl.* 3.29).<sup>763</sup> Given that Tertullian writes of

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<sup>755</sup> Clemens Alexandrinus, GCS, II.208.

<sup>756</sup> Eusebius recounts what Clement of Alexandria says, and adds no additional information to our understanding of the Nicolaitans, except that it lasted for a very short time. Euseb., *Hist. Eccl.* 3.29.

<sup>757</sup> Tertullien, *Traité de la prescription contre les hérétiques* (R. F. Refoulé, and R. de Labriolle, eds.; Sources Chrétiennes 46; Paris: Cerf, 1957), 134; ANF 3:259.

<sup>758</sup> ANF 3:259, n. 2209.

<sup>759</sup> Greek text: Marcovich (ed.), 319 (Refutio VII.36.3 = *Haer.* 7.24.3).

<sup>760</sup> ANF 5:115. See Amann, 502.

<sup>761</sup> Frank Williams (trans.), *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis: Book 1 (Sects 1-46)* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1987), viii.

<sup>762</sup> Williams (trans.), 84. Greek text: Epiphanius, GCS, I.279.

<sup>763</sup> The uncleanness could refer to bodily emissions, as in *Pan.* 26.4.5-8, in which Epiphanius writes about the disgusting love-feasts of the Stratiotics and Phibionites.

<sup>763</sup> My translation. Greek: Lake, LCL.

another Nicolaitan sect in his time that was distinct from the original one (*Praescr.* 33), it could be that Epiphanius was writing of a worse kind of Nicolaitans. It may also be that, with the passing of time, the sect had become more perverse, assuming that Epiphanius writes reasonably accurately.

We actually do not get a good deal from the church fathers on the particular contexts of the offences of the Nicolaitans. What we can see is that fornication is not at all referred to in a metaphorical sense in these patristic writings in relation to the sins of the Nicolaitans. For example, Clement of Alexandria (*Strom.* 2.20) calls for self-control of the appetite of eating, drinking and sexual desires, even to mention a certain Sophist in the church of Corinth during Paul's time who had continued to cohabit with a courtesan named Lais. He next describes the Nicolaitans as similar (‘τοιούτοι’)<sup>764</sup> in yielding to the lusts of the flesh.

## **7. Conclusion**

One admits that there were plenty of allegations (from within or outside the Christian circles) against libertine and permissive behaviours in some Christian groups. One cannot be totally sure where fiction departs from truth in the descriptions. If one leaves aside fantastical description of excessive practices, such as sexual orgies and consuming bodily secretions at communion, we still find in the prevalent culture a temptation for Christians to eat sacrificial meat and indulge in sexual entertainment at banquets and social meals.<sup>765</sup> Social meals could be in the company of friends or within networks of guilds and associations. Just as one cannot escape from the temptation to indulge in fleshly desires and the pressure to consume sacrificial food in the communal meals, one cannot easily avoid participation in the imperial cult. Its influence permeates all levels of the society right down to the livelihood level of a commoner in connection with trade guilds. This culture may form the general context for the paired offences that are condemned repeatedly in the ‘letters’. Beale indicates rightly that libertine behaviour in some Christian circles in Revelation

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<sup>764</sup> *Strom.* 2.20.118.3; Clemens Alexandrinus, GCS, II.117.

<sup>765</sup> Osborne, 156-57 is confident that ‘the problem in Thyatira centred on the guilds’. Social meals, such as in the guild feasts were a likely context for eating meat offered to idols and, to some extent, sexual immorality. He questions ‘the extent to which these feasts degenerated into debauchery’ which has implications for the interpretation of *πορνεύω*. A survey of literature I perform above shows that drunkenness and sexual immorality was an issue of concern for the churches.

must be understood especially against the background of compromise with trade guilds and their patron deities. This was especially the case when they were expected to pay their ‘dues’ to trade guilds by attending annual dinners held in honor of the guilds’ patron deities. Homage to the emperor as divine was included along with the worship of such local deities.<sup>766</sup>

Clement of Alexandria (*Paed.* 2.1, 2, 4) likewise admonished Christians not to indulge in the vices of feasts, such as in eating, drinking and misbehaviour. He exclaims in the passage he describes the Nicolaitans giving in to the pleasures of lust (*Strom.* 2.20.107.2-3):

And I agree with Antisthenes when he says, “Could I catch Aphrodite, I would shoot her; for she has destroyed many of our beautiful and good women.” And he says that “Love is a vice of nature, and the wretches who fall under its power call the disease a deity.”<sup>767</sup>

Ἐγὼ δὲ ἀποδέχομαι τὸν Ἀντισθένη, » τὴν Ἀφροδίτην « λέγοντα »  
κἂν κατατοξεύσαιμι, εἰ λάβοιμι, ὅτι πολλὰς ἡμῶν καλὰς καὶ  
ἀγαθὰς γυναῖκας διέφθειρεν. « Τὸν τε ἔρωτα κακίαν φησὶ  
φύσεως ἥς ἤπτους ὄντες οἱ κακοδαίμονες θεὸν τὴν νόσον  
καλοῦσιν.<sup>768</sup>

Using Antisthenes’ words as an anecdote, we see that the lure to sexual deviance was common to the extent that a deity was roped in to provide divine legitimization for one’s indulgence in immoral passions. Though *πορνεύω* in Revelation could take on the figurative meaning of idolatry,<sup>769</sup> the wider Graeco-Roman context suggests that a literal meaning is preferred for the offence of Jezebel’s circles, the Nicolaitans, and followers of Balaam’s teaching. It is in this larger cultural backdrop that I read the gastronomic and sexual deviance of Rev 2-3. The influence to such deviant behaviour seeps into the churches through leaders like ‘Jezebel’, who advocate syncretistic participation of Christians in pagan contexts. Members of the Christian ἐκκλησία may at the same time be members of pagan associations. Some members within her exclusive guild/association were from the Thyatiran ἐκκλησία. Fortunately, given the secretive nature of her ‘deep things’ (τὰ βαθέα) meant only for an inner circle, not the whole Thyatiran church was affected by her teaching. The

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<sup>766</sup> Beale, 30.

<sup>767</sup> *ANF* 2:371.

<sup>768</sup> Clemens Alexandrinus, *GCS*, II.171.

<sup>769</sup> See Yarbrow Collins, ‘Insiders and Outsiders’, see 214.

Nicolaitans and the followers of the teachings of Balaam belong likely to the same loose movement promoting the same offences.

Although the prophetess 'Jezebel' of my study remains a character-construct (her real identity is not known), we have learnt enough about her to understand a latent polemic directed against her that involves two other women figures: a great harlot and an OT queen. The following chapter will look at the Great Harlot of Rev 17-18, who is deemed to be used together with Queen Jezebel in an anti-Jezebelian polemic in Revelation. We now move to our second character-construct, the Great Harlot.

## Chapter Seven: Queens and Goddesses in the Face of the Great Harlot

To a reader of an age remotely different from that of the first readers, there appears to be lack of clear controls in the text of Revelation to help constrain one's interpretation of the Great Harlot in Rev 17-18. Her destruction in 17:16-18:24 has become to readers a caricature of various bad personalities or entities throughout history. As with the image of the beasts, I see the Great Harlot alluding foremost to persons/entities known to the first readers. Whilst one does not need to exclude an ideological or topological interpretation, the author writes in a parabolic way for Christians in the Graeco-Roman world, drawing heavily upon socio-historical elements familiar to them.

As polyvalence in some images of Revelation is common, I allow for the possibility of a polyvalent reading of her imagery.<sup>770</sup> The beast on which the Great Harlot sits is itself polyvalent. The beast, commonly accepted as Nero, would reappear from the abyss as another personality, the so-called 'returning/re-living' Nero (17:3, 8, 11; cf. 13:1), who is identified in Chapter Two as another emperor, Titus. The harlot sitting on the beast in Rev 17:3 would possibly denote, in a respect, a person/entity close to Nero, the beast. She has a close relation with Rome (the seven heads of the beast = seven hills; 17:9),<sup>771</sup> the Roman emperors (seven heads = seven kings; 17:9-10), or the Roman Empire (many waters = peoples, multitudes, nations and languages'; 17:1, 15). Her polyvalence could be reflected in the varying referents she 'sits on'.

In addition, Rev 17-18 depicts the Great Harlot at two levels: as a woman figure (17:4-6; 18:6-7) and as a city (16:19; 17:18 and 18:9-10). This study will focus on her image as a *woman*,<sup>772</sup> since past scholarship has focused on her city image,

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<sup>770</sup> James Knight, 'Was Roma the Scarlet Harlot? The Worship of the Goddess Roma in Sardis and Smyrna', in Richard S. Ascough (ed.), *Religious Rivalries and the Struggle for Success in Sardis and Smyrna* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2005), 104-19, see 105-6.

<sup>771</sup> The seven hills of Rome were popularly known to ancient writers. See Osborne, 617. The 'seven hills' (Capitoline, Palatine, Esquiline, Aventine, Quirinal, Viminal and Caelian) have become 'canonical' by late first century B.C.E. and is reflected in the works of various ancient authors. Henry S. Robinson, 'A Monument of Roma at Corinth', *Hesperia* 43 (1974): 470-84, see 480-81.

<sup>772</sup> Some suggestions made to this aspect of her identity: Jezebel of Rev 2:20; Cleopatra, Messalina, goddess Roma, Cybele, Artemis, etc. See Osborne, 608, 613; Adela Yarbro Collins, 'Feminine Symbolism in the Book of Revelation', *BibInt* 1 (1993): 20-33, see 27, 30; Beale, 848; John M. Court, *Myth and History in the Book of Revelation* (London: SPCK, 1979), 122-53; Judith E. McKinlay,



suggesting mainly Rome or Jerusalem as specific referents.<sup>773</sup> I do not see her woman and city aspects as mutually exclusive. More specifically, I highlight two particular aspects of her woman depiction, namely the known queens and popular goddesses, emerging from her image.

### **1. Queens in the Face of the Great Harlot**

The Great Harlot declares, ‘I sit as queen’ (κάθηναι βασίλισσα, 18:7). Two queens come to mind: primarily, Julia Agrippina the Younger (Nero’s mother, the fourth wife of Emperor Claudius) and secondarily, Valeria Messalina (the third wife of Emperor Claudius).

#### **1.1. Queenly status and attire**

Would an empress fit the description of the Great Harlot in Rev 17:3-6?

3 καὶ ἀπήνεγκέν με εἰς ἔρημον ἐν πνεύματι. καὶ εἶδον γυναῖκα καθήμενην ἐπὶ θηρίον κόκκινον, γέμοντα ὀνόματα βλασφημίας, ἔχων κεφαλὰς ἑπτὰ καὶ κέρατα δέκα. 4 καὶ ἡ γυνὴ ἦν περιβεβλημένη πορφυροῦν καὶ κόκκινον, καὶ κεχρυσωμένη χρυσίῳ καὶ λίθῳ τιμίῳ καὶ μαργαρίταις, ἔχουσα ποτήριον χρυσοῦν ἐν τῇ χειρὶ αὐτῆς γέμον βδελυγμάτων καὶ τὰ ἀκάθαρτα τῆς πορνείας αὐτῆς, 5 καὶ ἐπὶ τὸ μέτωπον αὐτῆς ὄνομα γεγραμμένον, μυστήριον, Βαβυλὼν ἡ μεγάλη, ἡ μήτηρ τῶν πορνῶν καὶ τῶν βδελυγμάτων τῆς γῆς. 6 καὶ εἶδον τὴν γυναῖκα μεθύουσαν ἐκ τοῦ αἵματος τῶν ἁγίων καὶ ἐκ τοῦ αἵματος τῶν μαρτύρων Ἰησοῦ. Καὶ ἐθαύμασα ἰδὼν αὐτὴν θαῦμα μέγα.

The harlot is clothed in purple and scarlet—the colour befitting royalties and aristocrats.<sup>774</sup> She is adorned with gold, jewels and pearls, demonstrating her wealth

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*Reframing Her: Biblical Women in Postcolonial Focus* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2004), 149-50.

<sup>773</sup> Rome: Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 150; Thomas B. Slater, *Christ and Community: A Socio-Historical Study of the Christology of Revelation* (JSNTSup 178; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 23-24. Royalty, *The Streets of Heaven*, 187-88; Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 95; Yarbrow Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 57-58; L. L. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, 14.

Jerusalem: Barker, 279-301; Eugenio Corsini, *The Apocalypse: The Perennial Revelation of Jesus Christ* (trans. and ed. Francis J. Moloney; Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1983), 328-38; J. Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary* (AB 38; Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1975), 282-88; Beagley, 92-112; Philip Carrington, *The Meaning of the Revelation* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1931), 247ff.

<sup>774</sup> Cf. Royalty, 190.

(17:4). She declares herself a ‘queen’ (βασίλισσα), glorifies herself and lives luxuriously (18:7). Being a powerful woman, Agrippina the Younger (hereafter, ‘Agrippina’) had certainly led a luxurious life. Not only was Agrippina a ‘queen’, she was a ‘mother’ (pejoratively called in 17:5), and more precisely, a queen mother. She had ensured her son’s accession even though Nero was not Claudius’ flesh and blood (Tac. *Ann.* 13.2.2).<sup>775</sup> Agrippina was known to dress elaborately.<sup>776</sup> Besides being a queen, Agrippina assumed the title *augusta*.<sup>777</sup> The title would perhaps match the harlot’s proud title as ‘queen’ (βασίλισσα) in Rev 18:7 and the harlot-city’s great power (cf. 17:18; the city refers to Rome)—she being the most powerful lady in Rome during her time. Like Livia, the wife of Augustus, being called *augusta*,<sup>778</sup> Agrippina was a suited candidate to be used as a personification of Rome in feminine terms. Both Livia and Agrippina were queen mothers ensuring the accession of their sons (Tiberius and Nero) to the throne.<sup>779</sup> Livia was the priestess of the Augustan cult,<sup>780</sup> while Agrippina was the priestess of the Claudian cult (Tac. *Ann.* 13.2).<sup>781</sup> Wood describes the woman priesthood that Agrippina held as ‘a title and a ceremonial role that no imperial women since Livia had enjoyed for any extended period’.<sup>782</sup> Divine nature was also ascribed to Agrippina. For example, an inscription from Mytilene calls Agrippina ‘νεα θεα’ (new goddess).<sup>783</sup> In terms of divinity, Augusta Livia was depicted as priestess of Ceres and assimilated to Juno, and took on a connection with fertility goddesses.<sup>784</sup> H. Mullens writes that the title *augusta* ‘connotes divinity, imperial power, fertility and slight right of conveying the royal power’.<sup>785</sup> This title befits Livia and, to some extent, Agrippina.

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<sup>775</sup> See J. Ginsburg, 20-22.

<sup>776</sup> In an occasion, she wore a mantle of golden cloth (Tac. *Ann.* 12.56).

<sup>777</sup> H. G. Mullens, ‘The Women of the Caesars’, *GR* 11 (1942): 59-67, see 66,

<sup>778</sup> Susan E. Wood, *Imperial Women: A Study in Public Images, 40 B.C. – A.D. 68* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1999), 316.

<sup>779</sup> Mullens, 62

<sup>780</sup> R. A. Kearsley, ‘Women and Public Life in Imperial Asia Minor: Hellenistic Tradition and Augustan Ideology’, *Ancient West and East* 4(2005): 98-121, see 113.

<sup>781</sup> Kearsley, 113, n. 72.

<sup>782</sup> Wood, 266.

<sup>783</sup> *EphEp* 2.8.

<sup>784</sup> Mullens, 61.

<sup>785</sup> Mullens, 61. For numismatic titles using Augusta from Corinth, see Wood, 293.

## 1.2. Agrippina the Younger and Nero's matricide

The most important link to Agrippina in the depiction of the Great Harlot is Nero's matricide. The Great Harlot was put to death by Nero, the beast.<sup>786</sup> Nero's matricide was taunted and ridiculed by the public. Graffiti expresses: 'Nero, Orestes, Alcmeon their mothers slew', and 'A calculation new. Nero his mother slew (Νεόψηφον· Νέρων ἰδίαν μητέρα ἀπέκτεινε)' with a Greek gematria code in the line.<sup>787</sup> Other acts of satirical hostility towards his matricide included

- (1) someone hanging a leather bag on a statue of Nero to indicate that he deserved the punishment of murderers to be thrown into the river in such a bag;
- (2) a tag left on an abandoned baby in the Forum saying, 'I won't rear you, in case you murder your mother' (οὐκ ἀναιροῦμαι σε, ἵνα μὴ τὴν μητέρα σφάξῃς);<sup>788</sup>
- (3) a parody on Nero based on Aeneas' act of filial piety of carrying his father Anchises to safety when Troy was sacked: 'Who denies that Nero comes from the great line of Aeneas: by one his mother was carried off, by the other his father' (Quis negat Aeneae magna de stirpe Neronem? Sustulit hic matrem, sustulit ille patrem);<sup>789</sup>
- (4) Datus, a performer of Atellan farces, singing in Greek: 'Farewell father, farewell mother' (ὑγίαινε πάτερ, ὑγίαινε μήτηρ)<sup>790</sup> imitating the gestures of drinking and swimming.<sup>791</sup>

Nero's murder of his mother certainly received negative attention from the public. In the depiction of Rev 17:16:

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<sup>786</sup> The beast-harlot as Nero-Agrippina could provide an alternative explanation as to how a beast (a Roman emperor) could destroy the harlot riding on it. In the harlot's popular identification as Rome, civil war becomes the scenario in which a Roman emperor destroys his own city. The fire that Nero was alleged to set to Rome (cf. Tac. *Ann.* 15.38-42) could have been behind the Nero-Rome reading of the beast burning the harlot with fire (Rev 17:16).

<sup>787</sup> Anthony A. Barrett, *Agrippina: Mother of Nero* (London: B T Batsford, 1996), 193.

<sup>788</sup> Cass. Dio, 62.16.2 (Cary, LCL).

<sup>789</sup> Suet. *Nero* 39.2 (Rolfe, LCL).

<sup>790</sup> Suet. *Nero* 39.3 (Rolfe, LCL).

<sup>791</sup> Suet. *Nero* 39.2-3; Cass. Dio, 62.16.2. For these mockery, see Barrett, 193.

καὶ τὰ δέκα κέρατα...μισήσουσιν τὴν πόρνην καὶ ἡρημωμένην  
ποιήσουσιν αὐτὴν καὶ γυμνὴν καὶ τὰς σάρκας αὐτῆς φάγονται  
καὶ αὐτὴν κατακαύσουσιν ἐν πυρί.

Agrippina's death did not involve a cannibalistic aspect like that of the Great Harlot. But the help of accomplices was sought in the murder plot. These accomplices were not 'kings', as were the ten horns aiding the beast to kill the harlot (17:12). Besides some input by Burrus, Seneca<sup>792</sup> and Poppaea,<sup>793</sup> the main executor of the murder appears to be Anicetus (prefect of the fleet at Misenum and a former tutor of Nero).<sup>794</sup> The failed murder plot designed by Anicetus using a collapsible ship<sup>795</sup> resulted in fantastical accounts of Agrippina's survival from sea accident.<sup>796</sup> As a last resort, Anicetus and assassins surrounded Agrippina in her bedroom and struck her dead by the sword with many stabs.<sup>797</sup> According to Suetonius (*Nero* 34.2), Nero had before this thrice attempted to poison Agrippina and once tried to making the panels of the ceiling fall on her while she slept, and various attempts to wreck her on board a ship.<sup>798</sup> Some contested sources have Nero gazing on Agrippina's naked body<sup>799</sup> before it was cremated on a dining couch the same night with little ceremony.<sup>800</sup> Her grave was said to be left uncovered during the time of Nero.<sup>801</sup> Nero's matricide was a major event receiving the attention of the public. It would not be surprising if this matter was alluded to in Revelation's imagery.

### 1.3. Agrippina's sexual excesses

Despite the brutal end to Agrippina, Nero had early in his rule given the password 'the best mother' (*Optima Mater*) to the Praetorian Guard and had often accompanied Agrippina in her litter.<sup>802</sup> He also gave Agrippina command over all

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<sup>792</sup> Barrett, 189; Dio 62.12.1-2

<sup>793</sup> Dio 62.12.1-2

<sup>794</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 14.3; J. Ginsburg, 48

<sup>795</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 14.3-8. For a discussion on details of her death, see Ranon Katzoff, 'Where was Agrippina Murdered?' *Historia* 22 (1973): 72-78; J. Ginsburg, 48- 53; Barrett, 183-90, 244-46.

<sup>796</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 14.5.

<sup>797</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 14.8.5; J. Ginsburg, 51.

<sup>798</sup> Not all details concur between Tacitus and Suetonius' account on the plot of shipwreck.

<sup>799</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 14.9.1; Suet. *Nero* 34.4

<sup>800</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 14.9.1

<sup>801</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 14.9.1

<sup>802</sup> Barrett, 150.

public and private business (Suet., *Nero* 9). The harlot's death by the beast she once was in close relation to was equally ironic. Nero's incestuous relationship with his mother was alleged later in his reign (more below). In Revelation, the Great Harlot fornicates with 'kings of the earth' (οἱ βασιλεῖς τῆς γῆς; 18:9). Like the harlot-on-beast, Agrippina was known for her fornication and incest with emperors (literally 'kings'): her son emperor Nero in his reign, Emperor Claudius, her uncle, before their marriage (Tac. *Ann.* 12.5.1; cf. Dio, 61.31.6) and earlier on with Emperor Caligula (her brother).<sup>803</sup> Other alleged sexual misdemeanours included affairs with an imperial freedman Pallas<sup>804</sup> and earlier on with Lepidus<sup>805</sup> and Tigellinus.<sup>806</sup> The riding of the beast, if understood in sexual terms, could refer to her incest with Nero. Tacitus (*Ann.* 14.2.2) writes of rumours of her incest. Based on Cluvius Rufus:

Agrippina's ardour to keep her influence was carried so far that at midday, an hour at which Nero was beginning to experience the warmth of wine and good cheer, she presented herself on several occasions to her half-tipsy son, coquettishly dressed and prepared for incest. Already lascivious kisses, and endearments that were the harbingers of guilt, had been observed by their intimates...

Ardore retinendae Agrippinam potentiae eo usque provectam, ut medio diei, cum id temporis Nero per vinum et epulas incalesceret, offerret se saepius temulento comptam et incesto paratam. Iamque lasciva oscula et praenuntias flagitii blanditias adnotantibus proximis...<sup>807</sup>

Rumours of Nero's incest with Agrippina also received attention in Suet., *Nero* 28.2: '[S]o they say, whenever he rode in a litter with his mother, he had incestuous relations with her, which were betrayed by the stains on his clothing.' (...*quotiens lectica cum matre veheretur, libidinum incestu ac maculis vestis proditum affirmant.*)<sup>808</sup> Whatever the truth behind this, the public was certain that Nero had a mistress who looked like Agrippina, and that Nero claimed he was sleeping with his mother (Dio, 62.11.4).<sup>809</sup> The rumours could be

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<sup>803</sup> Suet. *Cal.* 24.1.

<sup>804</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 12.65.4; 14.2.2.

<sup>805</sup> Dio, 59.22.6

<sup>806</sup> Dio, 59.23.9; Bauman, 163

<sup>807</sup> Jackson, LCL.

<sup>808</sup> Rolfe, LCL.

<sup>809</sup> J. Ginsburg, 52-53.

[e]ither...because Agrippina really did intend such a monstrous wickedness or because the contemplation of a new sexual depravity seemed quite believable in a woman whom in her earliest years had committed adultery with Lepidus in the hope of gaining power (*spe dominationis*), who, through the same ambition, had lowered herself to serve Pallas' desires, and who had been trained for every kind of disgrace by marriage to her uncle.<sup>810</sup>

The public image of Agrippina had indeed been tainted by sources of such kind.<sup>811</sup>

#### 1.4. Messalina the Harlot-Queen

Despite rumours of Agrippina's sexual deviance, she was, however, not as notorious in sexual exploits as Valeria Messalina, her predecessor.<sup>812</sup> Apart from Agrippina's use of sexual prowess to fulfill her political ambitions, Tacitus (*Ann.* 12.7.3) commented that she was otherwise chaste in her private life.<sup>813</sup> Messalina's image was tainted with an infamous affair and impudent marriage to consul-elect Gaius Silius while she was still Claudius' wife (*Tac. Ann.* 11.12 and 26-38)!<sup>814</sup> This cost her life. Equally striking was the repeated allegations that she literally prostituted while she was empress.<sup>815</sup> Bauman sums up the matter:

The Messalina of the sources is one of the great nymphomaniacs of history. The literary barrage attesting to this cannot be brushed aside. Juvenal's circumstantial account of her regular attendances at brothels under her trade-name of Lycisca is supported by the elder Pliny's attestation of a twenty-four hour marathon, Tacitus' list of twelve of her lovers, and Dio's description of group sex sessions in the palace at which the matrons' husbands were present....Dio says that husbands

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<sup>810</sup> J. Ginsburg, 19; cf. *Tac. Ann.* 14.2.2;

<sup>811</sup> Barrett tends to think that Agrippina's incest with Nero did not happen given the 'skepticism' of Tacitus and Dio. Barrett, 183. It suffices for the purpose of this chapter not to distinguish fact from fiction, but to highlight how certain public perception of Agrippina could have become elements for the depiction of the Great Harlot.

<sup>812</sup> Messalina was the third wife of Claudius, the emperor, while Agrippina the Younger was the fourth. Tacitus, *The Annals of Imperial Rome* (trans. Michael Grant; London: The Folio Society, 1996), 199; Wood, 252-53.

<sup>813</sup> Cf. Bauman, 179.

<sup>814</sup> Joshel, 225-26; Bauman, 176-79.

<sup>815</sup> Joyce E. Salisbury, *Encyclopedia of Women in the Ancient World* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC Clio, 2001), 228 (but the ancient source is not documented).

who agreed to be present were rewarded with honours and offices, but those who withheld their wives from the orgies were destroyed.<sup>816</sup>

Riding the popular perception and at the same time colouring it, Juvenal's sixth satire (115-32) depicts unmistakably the unnamed Messalina as the imperial whore (*meretrix Augusta*). He describes in lurid terms:

Preferring a mat to her bedroom in the Palace, she had the nerve to put on a nighttime hood, the whore-empress. Like that, with a blonde wig hiding her black hair, she went inside a brothel reeking of ancient blankets to an empty cubicle—her very own. Then she stood there, naked and for sale, with her nipples gilded, under the trade name of “She-Wolf,” putting on display the belly you came from, noble-born Britannicus.

sumere nocturnos meretrix Augusta cucullos ausa Palatino et tegetem praeferre cubili, sic nigrum flavo crinem abscondente galero intravit calidum veteri centone lupanar et cellam vacuum atque suam; tunc nuda papillis prostitit auratis titulum mentita Lyciscae ostenditque tuum, generose Britannice, ventrem.<sup>817</sup>

One does not know how much drama has been added to Juvenal's description, but it does reflect to a certain degree the public view of Messalina as a whore.

J. Bruns suggests that Messalina fits the bill of the harlot in Revelation because she was ‘remembered then as (1) a Roman Empress who (2) literally played the Harlot and (3) crowned her adulteries amid the luxurious surroundings of a drunken orgy’<sup>818</sup> (Tac. *Ann.* 31). The harlot holds a golden cup and is drunk with adulteries (Rev 17:4). This may allude to the orgies that Messalina participated, which involved wine (as in the cult of Dionysos)<sup>819</sup> and sexual excess.

Though Messalina's popular image as an ‘imperial whore’ is akin to the harlot-queen of Revelation,<sup>820</sup> her connection with Nero, the beast is not as clear as is in Agrippina's case. Messalina can be said, though, to ride another imperial beast, Claudius, who is not represented in the images of Revelation, except as one of the seven heads on the beast (17:9-10). As mentioned, a *general* representation of the

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<sup>816</sup> Cf. Juv. *Sat.* 6.115-32; Cass. Dio, 60.14.3; 60.18.1-2; 60.22.4-5; 60.27.4; 60.28.2-5; Tac. *Ann.* 11.26.1.

<sup>817</sup> Juv. *Sat.* 6.117-24 (Braund, LCL).

<sup>818</sup> J. E. Bruns, ‘The Contrasted Women of Apocalypse 12 and 17’, *CBQ* 26 (1964): 459-63, see 461-62.

<sup>819</sup> For Messalina's participation in the cult, see Tac. *Ann.* 11.31.4-5.

<sup>820</sup> Rev 17:15-16; 18:7

beast as Roman emperors (seven heads) is also in play in 17:3. In the light of both a specific and generic denotation of the beast-harlot imagery, the two notorious empresses could lie behind the queenly face of the harlot, albeit in a mixture of reality and creativity.

It is important to note a striking deviation of the Great Harlot from Agrippina and Messalina: The harlot murders the saints (17:6), yet Agrippina and Messalina were not known to be persecutors of Christians. Both of them nonetheless had ruthlessly eliminated many people who stood in their way to power.<sup>821</sup> The harlot's murder of Christians perhaps derives from some other referents to her imagery.<sup>822</sup>

### 1.5. Agrippina's tyranny

An additional point leads us to think that Agrippina contributed in a great part to the harlot's depiction. Agrippina as a powerful and dictatorial queen fits the picture of the woman sitting on an emperor (a beast with gematria 666 to his name), on Rome (the seven hills), and over the imperial world (the many waters). From the legitimization of an incestuous niece-uncle marriage,<sup>823</sup> Agrippina's tyranny began. Tacitus (*Ann.* 12.7) remarks,

From this moment, it was a changed state, and all things moved at the fiat of a woman—but not a woman who, as Messalina, treated in wantonness the Roman empire as a toy. It was a tight-drawn, almost masculine tyranny...<sup>824</sup>

Versa ex eo civitas et cuncta feminae oboediebant, non par lasciviam, ut Messalina, rebus Romanis inludenti. Adductum et quasi virile servitium.

The political maneuvering of Agrippina is clear from Tacitus' account. Claudius is portrayed under the control of Agrippina's political agenda. Judith Ginsburg comments,

For Tacitus's Agrippina, marriage to the emperor is the first step in her pursuit of the goal of having and exercising political power, and she is prepared to use any and every means at her disposal. According

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<sup>821</sup> See Richard A. Bauman, *Women and Politics in Ancient Rome* (London: Routledge, 1992), 179 and 171-76, respectively.

<sup>822</sup> Such as taking harlot Babylon as Rome, this trait could be explained by anti-Christian pressure from imperial Rome (e.g., Rev 2:13).

<sup>823</sup> Suet. *Claud.* 26.3.

<sup>824</sup> Jackson, LCL. On Agrippina's tyranny, see Wood, 259-60.



to Tacitus (*Ann.* 12.3.1), Pallas's arguments in favor of Agrippina did not alone convince Claudius. They were supplemented by the allurements of Agrippina (*Agrippinae inlecebris*), who "seduced her uncle by frequently going to him on the pretext of their familial relationship with the result that, preferred to the others and not yet a wife, she already enjoyed the power of a wife" (*nondum uxor potentia uxoria iam uteretur*, 12.3.1). For Agrippina already had a plan: the marriage of her son to the emperor's daughter. Tacitus here involves for the first time a motif that will inform the rest of the Agrippina narrative—her use of sexuality in the service of political ends.<sup>825</sup>

Caratacus (a formidable Celtic chieftain), who received amnesty from Claudius during his war on Britain, offered Agrippina 'conspicuously seated on another dais' near Claudius 'the same homage and gratitude' offered to emperor.<sup>826</sup> Tacitus exclaims (*Ann.* 12.37):

It was an innovation, certainly, and one without precedent in ancient custom, that a woman should sit in state before Roman standards: it was the advertisement of her claim to a partnership in the empire which her ancestors had created.<sup>827</sup>

Novum sane et moribus veterum insolitum, feminam signis Romanis praesidere: ipsa semet parti a maioribus suis imperii sociam ferebat.

This desire to rule continued into the reign of Nero. Early in Nero's reign, Agrippina presided hidden behind a curtain during a senate's meeting in the palace. In another event before an Armenian delegation, Agrippina, to the shock of everyone, she wanted 'to ascend the emperor's tribunal and to share his presidency' (*escendere suggestum imperatoris et praesidere simul parabat*; Tac. *Ann.* 13.5).<sup>828</sup> It was her strict domineering attitude and heavy-handedness in her control of Nero that had led him to plot her death.<sup>829</sup> Public sentiments about her heavy control of political affairs could have been reflected in the play *Octavia*, in which a nurse described Agrippina as 'pursuing rule' (*regnum petens*, line 59), and exclaims that 'she dared to strive

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<sup>825</sup> J. Ginsburg, 18.

<sup>826</sup> Cf. Jasper Burns, *Great Women of Imperial Rome: Mothers and Wives of the Caesars* (London: Routledge, 2007), 65.

<sup>827</sup> Jackson, LCL; also J. Ginsburg, 38-39.

<sup>828</sup> Jackson, LCL.

<sup>829</sup> Suet. *Nero* 34.1-2

after imperium over a sacrosanct world' (*ausa imminere est orbis imperio sacri*, line 156).<sup>830</sup>

As the Great Harlot on the beast fornicating with kings of the earth, Agrippina unites sexual prowess with political maneuver. She like the harlot fornicates with men of political importance (Rev 17:3). She similarly has great power, like the great city (17.18) ruling over the kings of the earth (17:16). The harlot as Agrippina is put to death finally by the imperial beast, Nero, she rides (Rev 17:18). The harlot's depiction shifts freely between a woman and a city (chs. 17-18).<sup>831</sup> Agrippina is a suitable female personification of the tyrannical power of Rome.<sup>832</sup> She, a domineering empress and queen mother, appears with Messalina, as the face behind a sacrilegious harlot and a tyrannical imperial city. As in Revelation's depiction, a queen-Rome image merges in Tacitus' narrative. Speaking of Messalina, Hallett and Skinner comments:

In a discourse of imperial power, Tacitus's Messalina functions as a sign of the imperial household, the city, and imperial power itself....Woman becomes empire or, more precisely, elements of imperial geography and imperial power itself.<sup>833</sup>

We see this for Messalina, and for Agrippina. Together they contribute to the queenly figure behind the Great Harlot. I posit further that goddesses are also featured in the face of the Great Harlot.

## **2. Goddesses in the Face of the Great Harlot**

Empresses and princesses in the imperial world were often assimilated to goddesses.<sup>834</sup> This constituted an aspect of imperial propaganda to promote the

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<sup>830</sup> Barrett, 160.

during the first period of Nero's reign Agrippina's role was highly public.... After 55 she seems to have assumed a much lower profile trying to work more behind the scenes, still exercising power and influence, but doing so in a much more subtle less easily defined way.

<sup>831</sup> She is dressed in royal colours (17.4).

<sup>832</sup> P. Touilleux, *L'Apocalypse et les cultes de Domitien et de Cybele* (Paris: Geuthner, 1935), 86, suggests Agrippina and Livia take on attributes of the great harlot. In a sense, the great harlot can stand, as a whole, for powerful empresses behind the throne. Cleopatra is also suggested. See Osborne, 108.

<sup>833</sup> Judith P. Hallett and Marilyn B. Skinner, *Roman Sexualities* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997), 242.

<sup>834</sup> See Tomasz Mikocki, *Sub Specie Deae: Les Impératrices et Princesses Romaines Assimilées à des déesses: Étude iconologique* (Rivista di archeologia supplement 14; Italy, Roma: Giorgio Bretschneider Editore, 1995).

reigning emperor to the company of the divine. Indeed, divine honours voted to Agrippina the Younger, Messalina and significant empresses and princesses of the principate are reflected abundantly in literary, epigraphic and numismatic sources. Tomasz Mikocki's *Sub Specie Deae* provides a comprehensive document of the cases. It suffices to note a few examples: Agrippina the Younger was assimilated in her lifetime with Cere/Demeter, Diana/Artemis, Fortuna, Isis, Juno/Hera, Cybele, Luna/Selene, Securitas, Venus/Aphrodite;<sup>835</sup> Messalina was assimilated with Ceres/Demeter, Eirene, Fortuna and Juno/Hera;<sup>836</sup> and Domitia, the wife of Domitian to Ceres/Demeter, Concordia/Homonoia, Juno/Hera, Isis, Venus/Aphrodite and Victoria/Nike.<sup>837</sup> In particular, Nero, in an inscription from Aezani in the province of Asia, was referred to as the natural son of '[θ]εῶς [Ἀγριππείνης]'.<sup>838</sup>

The ensuing comparison of traits between the Great Harlot and popular Graeco-Roman goddesses highlights a possible goddess-aspect in the harlot's depiction. A polemical intent of the author could lie behind such a harlot-goddess association.<sup>839</sup> Pagan deities, in general (including goddesses), could be considered the 'nemesis' of pious Christians, who excluded themselves from idolatrous elements in social meals, festivities and voluntary associations. Goddess worship and that of deities in general were prevalent in these contexts. As the Flavian period stands out prominently behind the Satanic trio (chs. 2 to 4), I will keep a particular eye on the period as I illustrate the Great Harlot's allusions to a few major goddesses, such as Cybele, along with Aphrodite, Isis and *Roma*.<sup>840</sup>

## 2.1. Cybele

Benko suggests that the Great Harlot on a beast in Rev 17 is a pagan goddess, particularly, Cybele,<sup>841</sup> apart from her commonly accepted identity as Rome. Cybele,

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<sup>835</sup> Mikocki, 38-42.

<sup>836</sup> Mikocki, 44-45.

<sup>837</sup> Mikocki, 52-54.

<sup>838</sup> *IGRom* 4.560; Barrett, 113.

<sup>839</sup> See ch. 9.

<sup>840</sup> These goddesses were chosen not to the exclusion of other possible 'candidates'.

<sup>841</sup> See Stephen Benko, *The Virgin Goddess: Studies in the Pagan and Christian Roots of Mariology* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1993), 105; similarly Touilleux, 86; a goddess: Karl Georg Kuhn, 'Babylon', in *TDNT*, 1:514-17. see 516.

also known as the Mother of the Gods or the Great Mother, is closely associated with Rome. She was invited into Rome<sup>842</sup> and was known as protectress of Rome.<sup>843</sup>

Benko writes of the Great Harlot in Revelation:

[T]here are certain elements in this vision which conjure up the image of a pagan goddess. The robe of this woman, decorated with jewels and pearls, is similar to those that clothed the statues of goddesses, who were commonly associated with wild beasts, such as lions. Homer called Artemis *πότνια θηρῶν*, and the image of a goddess as the mistress of wild animals is a familiar one in pagan mythology and art. Among the wild animals the lion is often depicted, sometimes surrounding the throne of the goddess, sometimes bearing the goddess on its back. The lion was part of the retinue of the *Dea Syria* and in a favorite representation of Cybele, she sits in a chariot drawn by lions. The association of this woman with a city is also typical of pagan goddesses....[T]hey were often protective deities of cities and were identified as the “genius” of that particular city. Thus they were sometimes represented with a city wall as a crown on their heads, as were Cybele and the Artemis of Ephesus. There is, however, a deeper analogy: a city is like a woman who bears, nurtures, and protects her children. The city is a woman in a symbolic sense.<sup>844</sup>

He elaborates:

Whatever the interpretation of this woman [in Rev 17] may be, the image is clearly patterned after that of a pagan goddess. I suggest that this goddess was Cybele to whose image Christians in Asia Minor were most often exposed. They were exposed to an image of the goddess wearing a richly decorated robe, with a symbolic wall on her head, and accompanied by lions. They were exposed to orgiastic, chaotic celebrations, promiscuity which Christians associated with the sin of fornication. The words with which she is most identified reminded Christians in Asia Minor of Cybele: “Babylon the great, mother of whores...” If we leave out the comma, it is not difficult to read in verse 17.5 “ἡ μεγάλη ἡ μήτηρ,” i.e. “the great mother.” Possibly Christians in Asia Minor could read between the lines....She says in her heart, ‘I am a queen on my throne...’ Because of this, her plagues shall strike her in a single day...no more shall the sound of harps and minstrels, of flute players and trumpeters be heard in you...” [Rev 18.22] Cybele’s orgiastic celebrations...were accompanied by just such music.<sup>845</sup>

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<sup>842</sup> Lynn E. Roller, *In Search of God the Mother: The Cult of Anatolian Cybele* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 6-7.

<sup>843</sup> Roller, 6-7.

<sup>844</sup> Benko, *The Virgin Goddess*, 105-6.

<sup>845</sup> Benko, *The Virgin Goddess*, 106.

Benko has raised important observations; among which, we see Cybele's title (*Mater Magna* or μεγάλη Μητήρ<sup>846</sup>) occurring lexically in the Great Harlot's title (Rev 17:5),

Βαβυλῶν ἡ μεγάλη ἡ μήτηρ τῶν πορνῶν καὶ τῶν βδελυγμάτων  
τῆς γῆς.

Cybele is called ἡ μήτηρ ἡ μεγάλη or ἡ μεγάλη μήτηρ normally,<sup>847</sup> but a resonance still exists in her name with the harlot's title. Moreover, she shares significant traits with the harlot.

### 2.1.1. Goddess of Anatolia and Rome

It is significant that Cybele originated in Asia Minor where the churches of Revelation were located. Ancient shrines at Çatal Hüyük indicating the worship of the 'Mother of All Living' have been excavated near the cult centre of Cybele at Pessinus in Asia Minor.<sup>848</sup> Not only was Cybele a longstanding goddess of Anatolia, she was very popular. In Anatolia in the first century C.E., '[v]irtually every community had its shrine of Meter, where the goddess was worshipped...as the protector of individuals and their families and friends'.<sup>849</sup> According to Strabo, Pessinus (an important provincial centre in Galatia,<sup>850</sup> in Asia Minor') had a temple 'of the Mother of the Gods' (τῆς Μητρὸς τῶν Θεῶν). Her priests were sovereigns/kings. The goddess was held in highest veneration.<sup>851</sup> Though the sovereignty of the priest-kings of Cybele in Pessinus diminished at the establishment of the Roman province of Galatia in 25 B.C.E., the importance of the cult remained. Notably, it was from Pessinus that a dark aerolith stone representing the 'Mother of the Gods' was transported to Rome in 204 B.C.E.<sup>852</sup> A sibylline oracle encouraged

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<sup>846</sup> Also Garth Thomas, 'Magna Mater and Attis', in *ANRW* II, 17.3 (1984): 1500-35, see 1513; Sharon Kelly Heyob, *The Cult of Isis among Women in the Graeco-Roman World* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1975), 74.

<sup>847</sup> Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Mich.: Zondervan, 1996), 306-7.

<sup>848</sup> R. E. Witt, *Isis in the Graeco-Roman World* (Aspects of Greek and Roman Life; London: Thames and Hudson, 1971), 130.

<sup>849</sup> Roller, 342-43.

<sup>850</sup> Beate Dignas, *Economy of the Sacred in Hellenistic and Roman Asia Minor* (Oxford Classical Monographs; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 229.

<sup>851</sup> Strabo, 12.5.3 (Jones, LCL); Dignas, 230-32

<sup>852</sup> Strabo, 12.5.3; Witt, 130-31. Also, Jan Bremmer, 'The Legend of Cybele's Arrival in Rome', in M. J. Vermaseren (ed.), *Studies in Hellenistic Religions* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1979), 9-22; See account in

her entry into Rome to bring victory for Rome in the Hannibalic Wars. Upon Cybele's official arrival in Rome, she was placed provisionally in the temple of Victory in Palatine until her own temple was ready in 191 B.C.E.<sup>853</sup> She was then 'worshipped not only as a Mountain Goddess, but as the mighty Mother of the Trojans and of the Romans, whom legend claimed were of Trojan descent'.<sup>854</sup> As a 'Roman Goddess', she protected Rome in her battles.<sup>855</sup> Virgil connects Cybele, Troy and Rome as a 'leit motif in *Aeneid*'.<sup>856</sup> Hawkins writes:

At last Rome will circle seven hills within its single wall, like a mother gathering her numerous children. Then, as the familiar images of crown, walls, and maternity come together, the City is transformed by simile into the figure of the Magna Mater.<sup>857</sup>

This mapping of goddess Cybele onto the city Rome resonates with the portrayal of the Great Harlot as a city (Rome; Rev 17:18). The Mother of the Gods assumes the role of the Mother of Caesars, being identified in Tiberiopolis (in Phrygia) with Livia—the wife of Augustus, who was also mother to the line of Julio-Claudian emperors. Correspondingly, Augustus was identified as Attis, Cybele's consort.<sup>858</sup> Cybele thus became integral to the ideology of the imperial cult. In 76 C.E., Vespasian restored the temple of Cybele in Herculaneum, which had collapsed in an earthquake.<sup>859</sup> According to Henri Graillot, the daughter of Titus, Julia, was a devotee of Cybele and Isis.<sup>860</sup> An inscription in southern Italy of the first century

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Robert Turcan, *The Cults of the Roman Empire* (trans. Antonia Nevill; Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 36-37.

<sup>853</sup> There were restrictions put on the exotic Phrygian rites of the *galli*. See Turcan, *The Cults*, 38; Philippe Borgeaud, *Mother of the Gods: From Cybele to the Virgin Mary* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 92.

<sup>854</sup> Maarten J. Vermaseren, *Cybele and Attis: The Myth and the Cult* (trans. A. M. H. Lemmers; London: Thames and Hudson, 1977), 11; R. J. Littlewood, 'Poetic Artistry and Dynastic Politics: Ovid at the Ludi Megalenses (Fasti 4.179-372)', *CQ*, NS 31 (1981): 381-95, see 381. Cybele's important role in Augustan ideology is propagated by Vergil in *Aeneid*. Littlewood, 381, n. 4, also see 386.

<sup>855</sup> Vermaseren, *Cybele and Attis*, 11.

<sup>856</sup> Littlewood, 53.

<sup>857</sup> Peter S. Hawkins, 'From Mythography to Myth-Making: Spenser and the Magna Mater Cybele', *Sixteenth Century Journal* 12 (1981): 50-64, see 54, reading of Verg. *Aen.* 6.783-87.

<sup>858</sup> Touilleux, 83.

<sup>859</sup> *CIL* 10.1406; Henri Graillot, *Le culte de Cybèle mère de dieux à Rome et dans l'Empire romain* (Paris: Fontemoing et cie, 1912), 148. Also, E. R. Baker, 'Past Excavations at Herculaneum', *Classical Review* 22 (1908): 2-5.

<sup>860</sup> Graillot, 148.

C.E. denotes a priestess named Cantria Longina serving the cults of Isis, Diva Julia (Titus' daughter) and Cybele.<sup>861</sup> (The association between Cybele and Isis, and the latter with the Great Harlot receives attention in the next section.) The cult of Cybele was practised in all the provinces of Europe.<sup>862</sup> In addition, there is plenty of archeological evidence of her cult in Asia Minor,<sup>863</sup> including city coinage featuring the goddess.<sup>864</sup>

### 2.1.2. Goddess of the mountain and beast

In the mountain flanks of Asia Minor, such as in Ephesus and elsewhere, ancient votive reliefs depict the mountain goddess standing or seated, often enthroned on the mountain.<sup>865</sup> Cybele's original depiction as a mountain goddess is striking in comparison with the Great Harlot sitting on a beast with seven heads/hills in Rev 17. Her move into Rome and her strategic position on the Palatine hill, one of the seven (on this hill Rome was founded<sup>866</sup>) speaks of her high stature in Rome. The goddess situated on an important hill of the 'seven' in Rome echoes the Great Harlot sitting on a beast signifying, in one respect, Rome with its seven hills (the seven heads of the beast). Equally significant is Cybele's association with beasts, specifically lions.<sup>867</sup> In the Orphic hymn to the Mother of the Gods, Cybele is depicted as riding a chariot drawn by lions. In the Homeric hymns, the Great Mother is depicted with wolves and lions.<sup>868</sup> There are variations in her portrayal with lions from the excavations. Sometimes a pair of lions squats on a high pedestal beside her; other times, she stands between lions, such as in a statue from Pergamum.<sup>869</sup> In a relief at

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<sup>861</sup> *CIL* 9.1153; Heyob, 90; *SIRIS*, 469.

<sup>862</sup> Vermaseren, *Cybele and Attis*, 11.

<sup>863</sup> See Vermaseren, *Cybele and Attis*, 27-32.

<sup>864</sup> Stephen Mitchell, *Anatolia: Land, Men, and Gods in Asia Minor*, vol. 1, *The Celts in Anatolia and the Impact of Roman Rule* (2 vols.; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 21-22.

<sup>865</sup> Vermaseren, *Cybele and Attis*, 14.

<sup>866</sup> n.a., 'Palatine Hill', in *NEncyBrit* 9:75.

<sup>867</sup> For Cybele and lions, see Mark Munn, *The Mother of the Gods, Athens, and the Tyranny of Asia: A Study of Sovereignty in Ancient Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 125-29.

<sup>868</sup> Cf. Vermaseren, *Cybele and Attis*, 11; Evelyn-White, LCL; T. W. Allen (ed.), *Homeri Opera*, vol. 5 (Oxford: e Typographeo Clarendoniano, 1952), 80, hymn XIV

<sup>869</sup> Vermaseren, *Cybele and Attis*, 27; cf. V. Müller, 'Eine Statuette der Kybele in Wien', *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Römische Abteilung* 34 (1919): 82-106.

Sardis, she is portrayed with Artemis carrying a lion, while Artemis carries a hind.<sup>870</sup> In another statue from Priene a lion serves as her footstool.<sup>871</sup> She stands on a lion that lies full length on the ground in Isindia in Pisidia.<sup>872</sup> In closer resemblance to the beast-straddling harlot in Rev 17:3, Cybele rides a lion on the great altar of Pergamum,<sup>873</sup> and similarly on the frieze in Priene in a temple of Athena Polias.<sup>874</sup> A coin much later than the time of Revelation has Cybele riding on the back of a lion.<sup>875</sup> In ancient terracotta of about 6000 B.C.E., the goddess sits on a rocky throne of two leopards as armrests.<sup>876</sup> One wonders whether the Mountain Goddess<sup>877</sup> with lions and her earlier image with leopards could have been elicited through associations with the harlot on the beast with a leopard's body, lion's mouth and bear's feet (Rev 13:2).<sup>878</sup> The connection with wild beasts of goddesses assimilated with Cybele, such as Aphrodite and Artemis, is discussed below.

### 2.1.3. As Aphrodite and other goddesses

Cybele's ability to assimilate with other goddesses is remarkable. Some of Cybele's epithets are 'Aphrodite, Artemis, Persephone or Demeter', the 'mistress of the wild beasts', the 'mother of the ear of corn',<sup>879</sup> 'the Great One', the 'Holy One' or the 'Mighty One'.<sup>880</sup> Inscriptions suggest the assimilation of Cybele, Isis and Astarte. A dedication at Delos was made to 'Isis, Mother of the Gods, Astarte'. An Alexandrian priest in 131/130 B.C.E. served both Isis and the Great Mother of the Gods. Common Italian priests at Brindisi and Ostia served both Isis and the Mother of the Gods.<sup>881</sup>

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<sup>870</sup> Vermaseren, *Cybele and Attis*, 11; G. M. A. Hanfmann and J.C. Waldbaum, 'Kybele and Artemis. Two Anatolian Goddesses at Sardis', *Archeology* 22 (1969): 264-69; also picture in Munn, 168.

<sup>871</sup> Vermaseren, *Cybele and Attis*, 31.

<sup>872</sup> Vermaseren, *Cybele and Attis*, 31.

<sup>873</sup> Turcan, *The Cults*, 35; Vermaseren, *Cybele and Attis*, 31.

<sup>874</sup> Vermaseren, *Cybele and Attis*, 31.

<sup>875</sup> Brent, *The Imperial Cult*, Plate 32; BMC (Commodus) 680 (Pl. 109, 15), reverse.

<sup>876</sup> Vermaseren, *Cybele and Attis*, 14-16, also figs. 4 and 5, and pl. 5.

<sup>877</sup> Vermaseren, *Cybele and Attis*, 15.

<sup>878</sup> More below on the 'bear' in relation to Artemis.

<sup>879</sup> That is, the mother of Attis. Attis is associated with the corn of the ear in relation to his castration.

<sup>880</sup> Vermaseren, *Cybele and Attis*, 10.

<sup>881</sup> Witt, 131.



Cybele is also identified with Rhea or Demeter.<sup>882</sup> The Cybele of Pessinus and the ‘universal mother’ of Crete share similar attributes, and together they became associated with the Isis figure. She also has ‘elementary parallels to the Attic Demeter, the Kretan Rhea, the goddesses of Syria and Kililia’.<sup>883</sup> She is said to be ‘the giver of fertility...a female Baal’.<sup>884</sup> Both Pessinus and Crete had a Mount Ida where orgiastic worship of the goddess took place.<sup>885</sup> There is a long-standing tradition of the worship of a mother goddess in Asia Minor. Sardis, the former capital of the ancient kingdom of Lydia, was the centre for the worship of the Mother of the Gods,<sup>886</sup> who was also known as Aphrodite. To the Phrygians and Lydians, Aphrodite was called Kybebe (Cybele),<sup>887</sup> who is demonstrated by Mark Munn to be Cybele, the Mother of the Gods.<sup>888</sup> Both Aphrodite and Cybele were, traditionally, mothers of significant tyrants in lands of Asia.

Just as the mother of Midas [of Phrygia] was the mother of tyranny, and came to be honoured as a divinity, so too was the woman who signified the foundation of Lydian sovereignty. Her story is preserved in *Homeric Hymn 5, To Aphrodite*. This Greek Hymn describes the sexual union of a goddess, who proves to be Aphrodite herself, and the father of a future lord of an Asia land.<sup>889</sup>

In the *Homeric Hymn*, the coupling of Aphrodite with Anchises, a herdsman, gives birth to Aeneas, the future lord of the Trojans and the founder of Rome. Mark Munn summarizes the encounter:

After anointing herself with perfumed oil and dressing in elaborately decorated clothing and rich jewelry in her temple at Paphos on Cyprus, Aphrodite comes to Anchises on Mount Ida “of the many springs, mother of wild beasts [μήτηρ θηρῶν].” As the goddess approaches “gray wolves and fierce-eyed lions fawn on her, and bears and swift leopards ravenous for deer.”<sup>890</sup>

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<sup>882</sup> Turcan, *The Cults*, 30.

<sup>883</sup> J. W. Crowfoot, ‘The Lions of Kybele’, *JHS* 20 (1900): 118-27, see 120.

<sup>884</sup> Crowfoot, ‘The Lions of Kybele’, 120.

<sup>885</sup> Witt, 131

<sup>886</sup> Munn, 95

<sup>887</sup> Munn, 114.

<sup>888</sup> See Munn, 114-25.

<sup>889</sup> Munn, 106. Here, Munn interprets Aphrodite’s son to be the tyrant of Lydia.

<sup>890</sup> Munn, 107; cf. *Hom. Hymn 5, Aphrodite* 55-70.

Rich jewelry is depicted on Aphrodite in the hymn:

They clothed her with heavenly garments: on her head they put a fine, well-wrought crown of gold, and in her pierced ears they hung ornaments of orichalc and precious gold and adorned her with golden necklaces over her soft neck and snow-white breasts, jewels which the gold-filleted Hours wear...

κρατὶ δ' ἐπ' ἀθανάτῳ στεφάνην εὐτυκτον ἔθηκαν καλήν, χρυσεῖην· ἐν δὲ τρητοῖσι λοβοῖσιν ἄνθεμ' ὀρειχάλκου χρυσοῖό τε τιμήεντος· δειρῇ δ' ἄμφ' ἀπαλῇ καὶ στήθεσιν ἀργυφέοισιν ὄρμοισι χρυσεόισιν ἐκόσμεον, οἷσιν περ αὐταὶ ὦραι κασμείσθην χρυσάμπυκες...<sup>891</sup>

Rich adornment is part of the Great Harlot's apparel in Revelation (17:4). In the account, many iconographic details assimilate Aphrodite to many goddesses, of whom Cybele is the main,<sup>892</sup> given that the child born of the union of Anchises and Aphrodite was Aeneas. There is also the reference to the copulation on Mount Ida, the mountain of the Great Mother. The 'mother of wild creatures' conjures the image of Artemis and other goddesses.<sup>893</sup> Anchises muses that she was, perhaps, 'Artemis, or Leto, or golden Aphrodite, or well-bred Themis or bright-eyed Athene...' (Ἄρτεμις ἢ Λητώ ἢ χρυσέη Ἀφροδίτη ἢ Θέμις ἡυγενὴς ἢ γλαυκῶπις Ἀθήνη...) <sup>894</sup> Particularly, the animals described included the lion, bear and leopard, which contributed to the characteristics of the beast in Revelation (13:2; cf. 17:3).

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<sup>891</sup> *Homeric Hymn* 6, To Aphrodite 7-13 (Evelyn-White, LCL).

<sup>892</sup> Cybele and Attis are associated with 'Aphrodite and Adonis, the goddess of love and her impetuous young husband'. Harold R. Willoughby, *Pagan Regeneration: A Study of Mystery Initiations in the Graeco-Roman World* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1929), 137. Cybele is also associated with the Syrian goddess, whose ritual parallels that of Isis in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*. Willoughby, 140.

For Aphrodite's connection with Cybele, see Munn, 106-8. Other scholars accepting this: p. 106, n. 41. Also, Britt-Marie Näsström, 'Cybele and Aphrodite: Two Aspects of the Great Goddess', in Lena Larsson Lovén and Agneta Strömberg (eds.), *Aspects of Women in Antiquity: Proceedings of the First Nordic Symposium on Women's Lives in Antiquity, Göteborg 12-15 June 1997* (Jonsared: Paul Åströms Förlag, 1998), 29-43, see 34.

<sup>893</sup> One of Artemis' epithets is: 'mistress of the beasts' (πότνια θηρίων); cf. Homer, *Iliad* 21.470; Christine M. Thomas, 'At Home in the City of Artemis: Religion in Ephesos in the Literary Imagination of the Roman Period', in Helmut Koester, *Ephesos: Metropolis of Asia: An Interdisciplinary Approach to its Archaeology, Religion, and Culture* (HTS 41; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), 81-117, see 87.

<sup>894</sup> *Hom. Hymn* 5, To Aphrodite, 93-94 (Evelyn-White, LCL); cf. Munn, 107.

The bear is associated with Artemis,<sup>895</sup> one of the goddesses named in the syncretistic portrayal of Aphrodite in the passage of *Homeric Hymn 5* above.

There in the hymn, the lion, with which the Mother of the Gods is often associated, signifies the future tyrant/king whom the mother nurtures.<sup>896</sup> In this way, the Mother of the Gods is, in a sense, the archetype for a queen mother in Rome, who ensures the accession of her son. Livia and Agrippina the Younger, both being queen mothers, were assimilated to Cybele.<sup>897</sup> The conflation of various goddesses and queens is also part of the iconography of the Great Harlot of Revelation. Cities are also part of her iconography. Aphrodite's function in Athens as *Pándēmos* (Paus. 1.22.3), thus 'the protectress of the entire community of citizens',<sup>898</sup> parallels Cybele's role as the protectress of cities.<sup>899</sup> Aphrodite's sexual notoriety reflects the Great Harlot's sexual excess.

#### 2.1.4. Mysteries and sexual excess

Cybele's connection to Aphrodite, among other goddesses, is significant for the Great Harlot called 'ἡ μήτηρ τῶν πορνῶν' (Rev 17:5). Aphrodite is famous for her connection with prostitution.<sup>900</sup> Herodotus (*Hist.* 1.199) describes the custom of prostitution that every local women of Cyprus were obliged to perform once in her lifetime in connection with the sanctuary of Aphrodite.<sup>901</sup> Venus (the Roman Aphrodite) is said to have introduced prostitution to Cyprus and is hailed as the founder of the occupation.<sup>902</sup> While Cyprus was a centre of worship of Aphrodite, the

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<sup>895</sup> Marija Gimbutas, *The Languages of the Goddess* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1989), 116.

<sup>896</sup> Munn, 125-27.

<sup>897</sup> Mikocki, 26, 41.

<sup>898</sup> Anne Ley, 'Aphrodite', in *NewPauly* 1:832-36, see 833.

<sup>899</sup> Patricia A. Johnston, 'Cybele and her Companions on the Northern Littoral of the Black Sea', in Maarten Jozef Vermaseren and Eugene Lane (ed.), *Cybele, Attis and Related Cults: Essays in Memory of M. J. Vermaseren* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996), 101-16, see 102.

<sup>900</sup> For alleged ritual prostitution in the cult of Aphrodite at Palaipaphos in Cyprus, see Philip H. Young, 'The Cypriot Aphrodite Cult: Paphos, Rantidi, and Saint', *JNES* 64 (2005): 23-44, see 27-28.

<sup>901</sup> See Jacqueline Karageorghis, *Kypris: The Aphrodite of Cyprus: Ancient Sources and Archaeological Evidence* (Nicosia: A.G. Leventis Foundation, 2005), 50. The factuality of this account by Herodotus has been questioned by some, e.g., Gerda Lerner, 'The Origin of Prostitution in Ancient Mesopotamia', *Signs* 11 (1986): 236-54, see 243. The idea in Herodotus' account seems to be repeated in later writings, e.g., Just. *Epit.* 18.5, and Aphrodite remained a goddess associated in literary sources with the occupation.

<sup>902</sup> Enn. *Sacra Hist.* 12.142-46, 3<sup>rd</sup> to 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C.E.

cult was widespread in the Greek world.<sup>903</sup> Prostitutes in Corinth were especially known for their beauty, luxurious living, and their worship of Aphrodite.<sup>904</sup> Justinus (*Epit.* 18.5) writes of the custom among Cypriots to give daughters to prostitution as an offering to Aphrodite, and as a means to earn money for their dowry. The shameful mysteries of Aphrodite are described by a number of writers. Clement of Alexandria writes:

In the rites which celebrate this pleasure of the sea, as a symbol of her birth, the gift of a cake of salt and a phallus is made to those who are initiated in the art of fornication; and the initiated bring their tribute of a coin to the goddess, as lovers do to a mistress.<sup>905</sup>

ἐν ταῖς τελεταῖς ταύτης τῆς πελαγίας ἡδονῆς τεκμήριον τῆς γονῆς ἁλῶν χόνδρος καὶ φαλλός τοῖς μυουμένοις τὴν τέχνην τὴν μοιχικὴν ἐπιδίδοται· νόμισμα δὲ εἰσφέρουσιν αὐτῇ οἱ μυούμενοι, ὥς ἐταῖρα ἐρασταί.<sup>906</sup>

Likewise, Firmicus Maternus (*Err. prof. rel.* 10) and Arnobius of Sicca (*Adv. nat.* 5.19; both 3rd to 4th century C.E.) write about the same mysteries of the Cyprian Aphrodite/Venus.<sup>907</sup> The corrupting influence of Aphrodite spurred an invective against her.<sup>908</sup> It might be that myth and reality were mixed together in the above portrayal of prostitution in the cult of Aphrodite.<sup>909</sup>

As with many cults in the Graeco-Roman world, sexual and other misbehaviours were alleged for the mysteries of Cybele. Back in the fourth century B.C.E., ‘nocturnal ceremonies’ of Cybele ‘with Sabazian rites that curiously prefigured the Bacchic mysteries’ involved the ‘cries of ‘Hyès Attès, Attès Hyès’.<sup>910</sup> Turcan concedes that ‘Attis...arrived in Phrygia with Sabazius’. Both were

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<sup>903</sup> Ley, 1.832.

<sup>904</sup> Ley, 1.832.

<sup>905</sup> Clem. Al. *Protr.* 2.13.2 (Butterworth, LCL).

<sup>906</sup> Clem. Al. *Protr.* 2.13.2 (Butterworth, LCL); GCS, I.12-13 (2.14.2).

<sup>907</sup> Cf. Karageorghis, 53.

<sup>908</sup> For invectives against Aphrodite, see also Ronald Schenk, *Soul of Beauty: A Psychological Investigation of Appearance* (Lewisburg, Pennsylvania: Bucknell University Press, 1992), 74-76.

<sup>909</sup> See Stephanie L. Budin, ‘Sacred Prostitution in the First Person’, in Faraone and McClure (eds.), 83-91.

<sup>910</sup> Turcan, *The Cults*, 30. For a highlighting of connections between the cult of Sabazius and that of Dionysus, see Ross S. Kraemer, ‘Ecstasy and Possession: The Attraction of Women to the Cult of Dionysus’, *HTR* 72 (1979): 55-80, see 61-63.

considered the same child of Cybele.<sup>911</sup> The Sabazian mysteries were based on the myth of Zeus' sexual relations with Persephone in the form of a dragon. A marriage rite is part of the initiation into the Sabazian mysteries. A golden snake is placed on the breast of the neophyte and removed from the lower parts (Arnobius, *Adv. nat.* 5.21). Clement of Alexandria (*Protr.* 2.16.2) derides the shamefulness of the symbol taught to initiates as the god who passes through the breast (...σύβολον τοῖς μνουμένοις ὁ διὰ κόλπου θεός). He shames Zeus' disgraceful behaviour! (...ἔλεγχος ἀκρασίας Διός).<sup>912</sup> Strabo speaks of the blessed Cybele's initiates participating in orgies in connection to the cult of Dionysus:

[H]appy he who, blest man, initiated in the mystic rites,...who, preserving the righteous orgies of the great mother Cybele, and brandishing the thyrsus on high, and wreathed with ivy, doth worship Dionysus. Come, ye Bacchae, come, ye Bacchae, bringing down Bromius, god the child of god, out of the Phrygian mountains into the broad highways of Greece.

ὦ μάκαρ, ὅτις εὐδαίμων τελετὰς θεῶν εἰδὼς, βιοτὰν ἀγιστεύει·  
τά τε ματρὸς μεγάλας ὄργια Κυβέλας θεμιτεύων  
ἀνὰ θύρσον τε τινάσσων, κισσῷ τε στεφανωθείς,  
Διόνυσον θεραπεύει.  
ἴτε Βάκχαι, ἴτε Βάκχαι, Βρόμιον παῖδα θεὸν θεοῦ  
Διόνυσον κατάγουσαι Φρυγίων ἐξ ὁρέων Ἑλλάδος εἰς  
εὐρυχόρους ἀγυῖας.<sup>913</sup>

Cybele was worshipped at nocturnal meetings along with Dionysus, and there was a connection between their mysteries.<sup>914</sup> The Bacchic mysteries of Dionysus were alleged to involve group sex/rape, murder, and all kinds of immorality.<sup>915</sup> The

<sup>911</sup> Strabo, 10.3.15; Turcan, *The Cults*, 30.

<sup>912</sup> Turcan, 321. For connection between Sabazius, Cybele and Attis, see Turcan, *The Cults*, 319. Also on degree of syncretistic association, see Sherman E. Johnson, 'The Present State of Sabazios Research', in *ANRW II*, 17.3 (1984): 1583-1613. Greek text: Clemens Alexandrinus, GCS, I.13.

<sup>913</sup> Strabo, 10.3.13 (Jones, LCL).

Marvin W. Meyer (ed.), *The Ancient Mysteries: A Sourcebook, Sacred Texts of the Mystery Religions of the Ancient Mediterranean World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987), 228. Also, Giulia Sfameni Gasparro, *Soteriology and Mystic Aspects in the Cult of Cybele and Attis* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1985), 67.

<sup>914</sup> Kirk Summers, 'Lucretius' Roman Cybele', in Eugene N. Lane (ed.), *Cybele, Attis and Related Cults: Essays in Memory of M. J. Vermaseren* (Leiden, New York; Köln, 1996), 337-65, see 352-53. Cybele is also often portrayed in connection with Demeter, Hecate and existing mystery religions in Greek literature. Summers, 352.

<sup>915</sup> The ceremony in Dionysian mystery is depicted on murals on the walls of a house called the Villa of the Mysteries in Pompeii to focus 'upon the mysteries of Dionysos as the mysteries of sexuality'.

phallus was a sacred object that was revealed in the rites.<sup>916</sup> Though there was a domesticated version of the cult in Rome, the frenzied orgies, as reflected in the Maenads in Euripides' *The Bacchae*,<sup>917</sup> continued in some places.<sup>918</sup> A Roman historian, Livy<sup>919</sup> documents the court witness of Hispala on the Bacchic mysteries in second century B.C.E.:<sup>920</sup>

From the time that the rites were performed in common, men mingling with women and the freedom of darkness added, no form of crime, no sort of wrong-doing, was left untried. There were more lustful practices among men with one another than among women. If any of them disinclined to endure abuse or reluctant to commit crime, they were sacrificed as victims. To consider nothing wrong...was the highest form of religious devotion among them. Men, as if insane, with fanatical tossings of their bodies, would utter prophecies. Matrons in the dress of Bacchantes, with disheveled hair and carrying blazing torches, would run down to the Tiber.... Men were alleged to have been carried off by the gods who had been bound to a machine and borne away out of sight to hidden caves: they were those who had refused either to conspire or to join in the crimes or to suffer abuse.

Ex quo in promiscuo sacra sint et permixti viri feminis, et noctis licentia accesserit, nihil ibi facinoris, nihil flagitii praetermissum. Plura virorum inter sese quam feminarum esse stupra. Si qui minus patientes dedecoris sint et pigriores ad facinus, pro victimis immolari. Nihil nefas ducere, hanc summam inter eos religionem esse. Viros, velut mente capta, cum iactatione fanatica corporis vaticinari; matronas Baccharum habitu crinibus sparsis cum ardentibus facibus decurrere ad Tiberim...Raptos a diis homines dici, quos machinae illigatos ex conspectu in abditos specus abripiant: eos esse, qui aut coniurare aut sociari facinoribus aut stuprum pati noluerint.<sup>921</sup>

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See Meyer (ed.), 64; also Walter Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987), 95-97.

<sup>916</sup> This is depicted on the frieze in Pompeii's Villa of the Mysteries. Meyer (ed.), 64; Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults*, 96. For the initiation rites, see Turcan, *The Cults*, 308-9.

<sup>917</sup> In the play, 'the initiates were said to tear animals to pieces...and eat raw flesh' after the myth of Zagreus being dismembered by Titans. Meyer (ed.), 64; Turcan, *The Cults*, 311; Clem. Al. *Protr.* 2.12.

<sup>918</sup> Turcan, *The Cults*, Meyer (ed.), 81.

<sup>919</sup> A Roman historian of the first century B.C.E. to early first century C.E.; Meyer (ed.), 81.

<sup>920</sup> Meyer (ed.), 81.

<sup>921</sup> Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita* 39.13.10-13 (Sage, LCL).

The testimony of Hispala resulted in the ‘destruction of most Bacchic shrines and the strict control of all Bacchic worship in Italy’.<sup>922</sup> The ‘machine’ (*machina*) in her account appears to be used for ritual murder in the name of sacrifice to god.<sup>923</sup> Though Livy’s account of the testimony was written much later (at the time of Augustus<sup>924</sup>) and appears rather sensational, it would be difficult to raise the accusation without any degree of truth. It may be that the account was based on ‘novelistic stereotypes and upper-class pretensions’, as Philip Harland puts it.<sup>925</sup> It would seem difficult, however, to clear Bacchic mysteries altogether of vicious practices, since the orgies of Dionysus were in themselves notorious in the Graeco-Roman world. A fourth century Christian writer, Firmicus Maternus, further charges the use of vicious spells over women in relation to Dionysus (*Err. prof. rel.* 6.6).<sup>926</sup> The spread of the Dionysian mysteries during the first three centuries C.E. is evident through the symbols on pottery, gems, mosaic, and funerary art.<sup>927</sup> The frequency of the nocturnal mystery rites increased from biennial observances to several times a month, as was the case when Bacchanalia were suppressed in Italy in 186 B.C.E.<sup>928</sup> In the first half of the second century, Justin Martyr condemned the rites of Cybele as a widespread perversion, possibly in connection with some other mystery cults.<sup>929</sup>

Another goddess, Agdistis, has been found to take on the profile of Cybele. Turcan cites three examples:

In an inscription from Sardis...a copy of a ruling by the Persian governor has been recognized, dating back to the fourth century BC and relating to the ‘mysteries’ of Agdistis....A relief from Piraeus dated to c. 300 BC shows us Attis seated facing an ‘Angdistis’ with

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<sup>922</sup> Meyer (ed.), 81. Allegedly, there were 6000 executions in the Roman suppression of the cult as a result. Sarolta A. Takács, ‘Politics and Religion in the Bacchanalian Affair of 186 B.C.E.’, *HSCP* 100 (2000): 301-10, see 301. Takács’ paper highlights the political reasons for the suppression.

<sup>923</sup> Turcan, *The Cults*, 303.

<sup>924</sup> Philip Harland, *Associations*, 75.

<sup>925</sup> Harland, *Associations* 75; Shelly Matthews, *First Converts: Rich Pagan Women and the Rhetoric of Mission in Early Judaism and Christianity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 82. For Dionysiac rites, Albert Henrichs, ‘Changing Dionysiac Identities’ in Ben F. Meyer and E. P. Sanders (eds), *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition*, vol. 3 (3 vols.; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 137-60, see 147-48.

<sup>926</sup> Turcan, *The Cults*, 327.

<sup>927</sup> Turcan, *The Cults*, 307.

<sup>928</sup> Turcan, *The Cults*, 307-8.

<sup>929</sup> Justin, *1 Apol.* 27.

the profile of Cybele. Another stele (provenance unknown, but Greek) bears a dedication to Agdistis, with the portrayal of a goddess with a *tympanum*, standing between two lions, who has all the appearance of the Phrygian Great Mother.<sup>930</sup>

This is the earliest attestation of mysteries in connection with Cybele in Asia Minor.<sup>931</sup> In the Hellenistic and Roman period, the labeling of the Cybele cult as a ‘mystery’ becomes quite common together with its category as ὄργια (or ὀργιασμός).<sup>932</sup> Pseudo-Plutarch mentions the mysteries of Cybele in his treatise *De Fluv* (10.5; 13.1. 90).<sup>933</sup> Clement of Alexandria reports on the σύμβολον of Cybele’s mysteries in connection to ‘Orphic’ or ‘Eleusinian’ gold leaves.<sup>934</sup> The initiation to the mysteries is reflected in a ‘mystic formulae’ (τὰ σύμβολα τῆς μύσεως; *Protr.* 2.15.3), ‘I ate from the drum; I drank from the cymbal; I carried the sacred dish; I stole into the bridal chamber.’ (ἐκ τυμπάνου ἔφαγον· ἐκ κυμβάλου ἔπιον· ἐκερνοφόρησα· ὑπὸ τὸν παστὸν ὑπέδυν.)<sup>935</sup> Scholars have found it difficult to unravel the mystery rites connected with this description.<sup>936</sup> Inscriptional evidence of the mystery rites in the Cybele cult in Asia Minor includes: certain documents dated to the first century C.E. that mention the initiates as ‘Ἀτταβοκαοί’, and thus believed to demonstrate Attis’ role in the mysteries;<sup>937</sup> a record of a mystes of the Mother Basileia at Pergamum; an inscription of 200 C.E. with the words ‘μυστήριον Ἄττει’,<sup>938</sup> and the inscription warning against the removal of a statue, and a fine to be paid to ‘Μητρὶ θεῶν Σμυρ[ναϊκ]ῇ ΤΕΛΕΤΩ’, which may be in connection to the ‘τελεται’ of the mysteries. The inscription denotes the Mother of Gods as the city goddess of Smyrna.<sup>939</sup>

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<sup>930</sup> Turcan, *The Cults*, 321. Cf. *CCCA* II, 92f, no. 308, pl. LXXVIII ; and VII, 49f., no. 175, pl. CVI.

<sup>931</sup> Gasparro, 67.

<sup>932</sup> Gasparro, 68. Kraemer identifies the features of ‘ὄργια’ in the context of Bacchic and Sabazius rites: ‘nightly celebrations, restricted initiations, snakes, fennel, ritual dancing, the predominance of women’. Kraemer, 61.

<sup>933</sup> Gasparro, 69.

<sup>934</sup> Gasparro, 66. For connection to Orphic or Eleusinian mysteries, see Gasparro, 78-79.

<sup>935</sup> Clemens Alexandrinus, *GCS*, I.13; Gasparro, 66.

<sup>936</sup> For rites, see Gasparro, 79-83.

<sup>937</sup> Gasparro, 70.

<sup>938</sup> Gasparro, 71; *ISardBR*, 37-40.

<sup>939</sup> Gasparro, 72-73.



Both Christian and non-Christian writers of antiquity condemn the cult of Cybele for sexual promiscuity, ritual murder and cannibalism. Justin Martyr refutes such charges against Christians by accusing the subjects of Emperor Antoninus Pius of participating in these activities themselves. He further attributes the same practices to the followers of Simon Magus and Gnostics contemporary to Marcion.<sup>940</sup> He also seems to accuse the participants of the cult of the Mother of the Gods of prostitution and sodomy (Justin, *1 Apol.* 27.4) by mentioning these offences with the mysteries of the Great Mother:

And there are some who prostitute even their own children and wives, and some are openly mutilated for the purpose of sodomy; and they refer these mysteries to the mother of the gods, and along with each of those whom you esteem gods there is painted a serpent, a great symbol and mystery.<sup>941</sup>

Οἱ δὲ καὶ τὰ ἐαυτῶν τέκνα καὶ τὰς ὁμοζύγους προαγωγεύονται, καὶ φανερώς εἰς κιναιδίαν ἀποκόπτονται τινες καὶ εἰς μητέρα θεῶν τὰ μυστήρια ἀναφέρουσι, καὶ παρὰ παντὶ τῶν νομιζομένων παρ' ὑμῖν θεῶ<ν> ὄφιν σύμβολον μέγα καὶ μυστήριον ἀναγράφεται.<sup>942</sup>

Others write of the perversion of the emasculated *galli* (Mart. *Epigr.* 5.41.1-3<sup>943</sup>). Tertullian describes in disgust the spectacles he watched as a youth in Africa that enact the myth of Attis castrating himself for the Great Mother.<sup>944</sup> Augustine hints at the secret practices ‘screened by the walls of the temple’ (*sacrarum aedium parietibus occuluntur*), of the ‘mutilated and effeminate men’ (*abscisos et molles*) of the cult.<sup>945</sup> He calls Cybele the ‘harlot goddess’ (*dea meretrix*).<sup>946</sup> Interestingly, A. Fear notes that ‘Augustine’s language’ in his denunciation of the goddess ‘mirrors almost exactly the denunciation of Christian ritual by earlier pagan authors’.<sup>947</sup> It seems incredible that Christians would get involved, perhaps mistakenly, in the

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<sup>940</sup> Borgeaud, 94.

<sup>941</sup> *ANF* 1:228.

<sup>942</sup> Justin, *Apologie pour les Chrétiens* (Charles Munier, ed.; Sources Chrétiennes 507; Paris: Cerf, 2006), 203-4.

<sup>943</sup> Cf. Borgeaud, 95.

<sup>944</sup> Borgeaud, 99.

<sup>945</sup> Augustine, *Civ.* 6.7; cf. A. T. Fear, ‘Cybele and Christ’, in Lane (ed.), 37-50, see 49.

<sup>946</sup> in *Hoseam* 1.4.14; Fear, 49.

<sup>947</sup> *Civ.* 2.4; 2.26; Fear, 49.

mystery rites of Cybele. Marvin Meyer writes that the Naassenes, a gnostic sect, ‘reinterpreted the mysteries of the Great Mother and Attis to suit their own religious purposes’.<sup>948</sup> The Naassene Gnostics took part in the mysteries of the Great Mother.<sup>949</sup> Among their works were found hymns to Attis (Hippol., *Haer.* 5.9.8-9).<sup>950</sup> Furthermore, Hippolytus’ account of the Naassenes refers to themes from the mysteries of Adonis, Demeter and Persephone (or Kore), and Isis and Osiris. Some form of pagan syncretism must have been going on in some circles of Christianity.

One wonders whether the reference to ‘μυστήριον’ (Rev 17:5) as part of the Great Harlot’s title has anything to do with these unspeakable mystery rites. The term, ‘μυστήριον’ in her title can mean ‘mystery’ or ‘secret rite’.<sup>951</sup> In fact, the rest of the harlot’s name elaborates the nature of the ‘mystery’: she is the ‘mother of prostitutes and the abominations of the earth’ (ἡ μήτηρ τῶν πορνῶν καὶ τῶν βδελυγμάτων). The ‘mystery’ in her title might have parodied the unspeakable ‘mysteries’ of pagan cults, unveiling her as the representation of entities vile and lewd (including goddesses, the source of idolatry). In fact, initiates were kept under oath not to divulge what ensued during the conduct of the mysteries.<sup>952</sup> In terms of the suspiciously lewd activities alleged of Cybele and her so-called ‘son’, Dionysus/Sabazius, the Great Mother could measure up to the great prostitute in Revelation (17:1). The golden cup prominently depicted in the harlot’s image, and her drunken stupor and fornication (17:4) could all reflect the context of orgies of Dionysus and Cybele in which wine and sexual titillation played a part.<sup>953</sup>

#### 2.1.5. Cybele in the face of the Great Harlot

In sum, the Great Mother, Cybele (the native goddess of Anatolia), with assimilated goddesses, such Aphrodite and Agdistis, along with the related mysteries of Dionysus and Sabazius, exhibit correspondences to the Great Harlot in Rev 17. Cybele is often associated with the lion, and is depicted as riding one in some instances. Correspondingly, the Great Harlot sits on a beast that has an attribute of a

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<sup>948</sup> Meyer (ed.), 147

<sup>949</sup> Meyer (ed.), 147.

<sup>950</sup> Meyer (ed.), 147; see also Turcan, *The Cults*, 260-61.

<sup>951</sup> Under lexical entry: μυστηρι-άζω; LSJ, 1156.

<sup>952</sup> Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults*, 74.

<sup>953</sup> Meyer (ed.), 64.

lion. The mysteries of the cult of the Great Mother in relation to the cult of Dionysos or Sabazios are alleged to include sexual license. Her cult in some respects exhibits licentiousness and her association with Aphrodite further contributes to her title of ‘*dea meretrix*’ (August. in *Hoseam* 1.4.14). Cybele’s title, ‘the Great Mother’, is lexically reflected lexically in the Great Harlot’s title. Her role as Rome’s protectress and as the mother of Caesars would tie in neatly with the city-aspect of the harlot as Rome, and with her sitting on a beast with seven heads, signifying kings/emperors, and the seven hills of Rome. Cybele’s worship is also prevalent across the imperial world. In this sense, she sits over ‘many waters’.

## 2.2. Isis

Isis is another major goddess in the imperial world. The Isiac cult became popular in places around the Mediterranean, including Asia.

...Isiac brotherhoods established in Asian centers, such as Smyrna, Cyzicus, and Ephesus, and on the islands of Rhoades, Delos, and Tenedos, as well as in Thessaly and Thrace. A full century before Jesus of Nazareth was born, Egyptian sailors and merchants had propagated the cult of Isis all along the coasts of Syria, Asia Minor, Greece, and among the Aegean Islands. When Paul began his missionary work in these regions, he everywhere met with Isiac establishments that were already centuries old.<sup>954</sup>

Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses* (second century C.E.) has Isis introducing herself as ‘the mother of the universe, mistress of all the elements,...mightiest of deities...and foremost of heavenly beings’ (*rerum naturae parens, elementorum omnium domina,...summa numinum,...prima caelitem*) and in she ‘manifests the aspect of all gods and goddesses’ (*deorum dearumque facies uniformis*).<sup>955</sup> Her names also include Mother of the Gods, Minerva, Venus, Diana, Proserpina, Ceres, Juno, Bellona, Hecate, and Queen Isis. She proclaims herself worshipped all over the world in various ways according to various customs of different peoples (11.5).<sup>956</sup> A climatic moment in the story is set in Cenchreae, a port of Corinth,<sup>957</sup> in which Isis appears and Lucius sheds the image of an ass and reverts to a man, during the Isis

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<sup>954</sup> Willoughby, 180.

<sup>955</sup> Hanson, LCL.

<sup>956</sup> Hanson, LCL.

<sup>957</sup> H. J. Mason, ‘Lucius at Corinth’, *Phoenix* 25 (1971):160-65, see 160.

festival procession to the coast (*Metam.* 11.9-11, 16). A sanctuary complex of Isis at Cenchreae has likely been found.<sup>958</sup> *P.Oxy.* 11.1380 also reflects a multitude of names (a very long list), the all-encompassing characteristics and widespread worship of Isis in many places. The universal syncretistic assimilation of Isis is evident.<sup>959</sup> J. Griffiths notes that ‘Apuleius emphasizes her pantheism and the pan syncretism which makes her one with other goddesses everywhere’.<sup>960</sup> Plutarch uses the epithet ‘myriad-named’ (μυριώνυμος) of Isis.<sup>961</sup> In particular, Griffiths notes his interest in the assimilating Isis and Demeter,<sup>962</sup> thus associating her with the Eleusinian rites. Moreover, ‘Isis is to him a goddess of wisdom, and her mysteries lead to γνῶσις of the highest being, that is Osiris’.<sup>963</sup> Phrygians in Anatolia, where the seven churches of Revelation are located, call her the ‘Mother of the Gods’ (*deum matrem*; Apul. *Metam.* 11.5).<sup>964</sup> Mary Beard comments, ‘Isiac hymns...praised her as responsible for the whole apparatus of the Graeco-Roman Pantheon; and her adherents claimed that she was worshipped under many different divine names throughout the world....’<sup>965</sup> Assimilation with many other goddesses boosts Isis receptivity and importance in the imperial world.

### 2.2.1. Popularity with the Flavian dynasty

Isis is a deity connected with the Flavian dynasty. The cult of Isis, which originated in Egypt, gained popularity in Hellenistic times when she was associated with a new god Sarapis, a name possibly derived from Osiris-Apis.<sup>966</sup> The cult spread quickly into Greece and Italy. Excavations attest to a sanctuary of Isis in Athens by the fourth

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<sup>958</sup> Mason, 160. See also Witt, 130. For sanctuary complex, Dennis E. Smith, ‘The Egyptian Cults at Corinth’, *HTR* 70 (1977): 201-31, see 203-10. The paper also presents some other archaeological evidences of Isis cult in Corinth.

<sup>959</sup> For discussion of the assimilation of many goddesses into the Isis figure or the universal mother figure, see Witt, 130-31.

<sup>960</sup> J. Gwyn Griffiths (ed.), *Plutarch’s De Iside et Osiride* (University of Wales Press, 1970), 51.

<sup>961</sup> Griffiths (ed.), 51, 53. The work is dated to a couple of years before 120 C.E. Griffiths (ed.), 17.

<sup>962</sup> Griffiths (ed.), 51.

<sup>963</sup> Griffiths ascribes Plutarch’s connection of Isis to ‘wisdom’ as a Platonic and Gnostic interpretation. Griffiths (ed.), 51.

<sup>964</sup> Mary Beard, *The Roman Triumph* (Cambridge: Mass.; London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 281.

<sup>965</sup> Beard, 281.

<sup>966</sup> Benko, *The Virgin Goddess*, 44, and n. 62; also Heyob, 3.

century B.C.E. and to evidence of the cult flourishing in Italian cities by the first century A.D.<sup>967</sup> Reception in Rome was less easy, but Caligula (37-41 C.E.) officially recognised the cult.<sup>968</sup> Erik Sjöqvist notes the Flavians once again gave official recognition to the cult.<sup>969</sup> This goddess was closely connected with Vespasian and Titus' victory in the Jewish war. Shelly Matthews observes,

The Flavians linked the goddess Isis with success in military conquest including the conquest of Judea. It is Josephus himself who reports that Titus and Vespasian spent the night preceding the triumph celebrating the victory over Judea inside the Iseum on the Campus Martius (*J.W.* 7.123). Two coins of Vespasian commemorating this event portray the Iseum on their reverse. This linkage is not forgotten by Domitian, as his erection of an Arch of Isis on the Campus Martius clearly shows. Minerva stands at the center of the Arch flanked by Isis and Anubis. Above the three gods, captives are depicted chained to palm trees, a symbolic representation of Judea's submission after the war with Rome.<sup>970</sup>

Besides the arches built, the success in the Jewish war was repeatedly featured on other coin types throughout Vespasian and Titus' rule.<sup>971</sup> The conquest of Judea had become an important element in the Flavian propaganda, and it seems significant that Isis was portrayed in connection with it.

There appears to be important connections of Vespasian and Titus with another Egyptian deity, Sarapis, the consort of Isis.<sup>972</sup> Some sort of 'myth', including the miracles Vespasian performed in Alexandria, seems to have been developed to

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<sup>967</sup> Benko, *The Virgin Goddess*, 44.

<sup>968</sup> Benko, *The Virgin Goddess*, 45.

<sup>969</sup> Erik Sjöqvist, 'Queen or Goddess', *Record of the Art Museum, Princeton University* 19 (1960): 87-92, see 92. The Isis and Serapis cult were popular with the imperial dynasties of the Antonines and Severi after the Flavians. Abd El-Mohsen El-Khachab, "'Ο "ΚΑΡΑΚΑΛΛΟΣ" ΚΟΣΜΟΚΡΑΤΩΡ', *JEA* 47 (1961): 119-33, see 123, n. 6.

<sup>970</sup> Matthews, 18. For a bronze coin of 71 C.E.: Vespasian on the obverse and a 'Tetrastyle temple of Isis with semi-circular pediment' on the reverse; *RIC* 2.70, no. 453. For Arch of Isis: Michel Malaise, *Inventaire préliminaire des documents égyptiens découverts en Italie*. (EPRO 21; Leiden: Brill, 1972), 190-91, pl. 16; Paul MacKendrick, *The Mute Stones Speak: The Story of Archaeology in Italy* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; New York: W. W. Norton, 1983), 298.

<sup>971</sup> For arches, J. Henderson, 'Par Operi Sedes: Mrs Arthur Strong and Flavian Style, The Arch of Titus and the Cancelleria Reliefs' in A. J. Boyle and W. J. Dominik (eds.), *Flavian Rome: Culture, Image, Text* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 229-54. For coin types in Jane M. Cody, 'Conquerors and Conquered on Flavian Coins', in A. J. Boyle and W. J. Dominik (eds.), 103-23.

<sup>972</sup> Witt, 234.

support his ascension to the purple.<sup>973</sup> Tacitus reports Vespasian healing a blind man and another with a maimed hand under the instructions of Sarapis. According to Tacitus, the incident had aroused Vespasian's further interest in the cult (Tac. *Hist.* 4.81-82). In the temple of Sarapis in Alexandria, he witnessed a vision of Basilides, a foremost man of Egypt, which he interpreted as a sign of ascension to the purple.<sup>974</sup>

Takács explains the rationale of possible 'myth' development,

Even if these two 'miracles' were mere fabrications or manipulations to create a 'Vespasian myth,' its creation followed a logical pattern provided by the geographical context in which Vespasian had placed himself. Outside this context, it became the story of a man who possessed superhuman abilities and was, therefore, worthy to be declared the rightful successor to the supreme political position that the Julio-Claudians had claimed by means of heredity since the death of Augustus. As Alexandria had harbored and protected Vespasian the temple of Isis in the *campus Martius* sheltered him and Titus on the night of their return to Rome.<sup>975</sup>

Showing subservience to Isis and Sarapis,<sup>976</sup> the two major deities of Egypt, would have definitely helped to heighten the popularity of Vespasian who was first proclaimed 'imperator' by troops of Tiberius Alexander of Alexandria (Tact. *Hist.* 2.79), and only subsequently in Judea (Suet., *Vesp.* 7). Takács comments rightly:

Vespasian and his immediate successors remained attached to Sarapis and Isis. The two gods deserved Flavian reverence since their place of origin, Egypt, had been so integral to Vespasian's ascension.<sup>977</sup>

She remarks elsewhere, 'The legions in Alexandria had proclaimed him emperor. The city's gods stood on his side and neither Vespasian nor his sons ever forgot it.'<sup>978</sup>

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<sup>973</sup> Sarolta A. Takács, *Isis and Sarapis in the Roman World* (RGRW 124; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995), see 96.

<sup>974</sup> Also, Suet. *Vesp.* 7; Heyob, 27-8; see also Sarolta A. Takács, 'Alexandria in Rome', *HSCP* 97 (1995): 263-76, see 273. See also Kenneth Scott, 'The Role of Basilides in the Events of A.D. 69', *JRS* 24 (1934): 138-40.

<sup>975</sup> Takács, *Isis and Sarapis*, 97.

<sup>976</sup> Takács, 'Alexandria', 268.

<sup>977</sup> Takács, *Isis and Sarapis*, 97. For the special devotion of the Flavians to Isis and Serapis, see Peter Garnsey and Richard Saller, *The Roman Empire: Economy, Society and Culture* (London: Duckworth, 1987), 171-72.

<sup>978</sup> Takács, 'Alexandria', 272.

Titus' participation in the consecration of the Apis bull in the Isiac-Sarapis cult in Memphis after the successful war against Jerusalem (Suet., *Tit.* 5.3) portrays a connection between the Eastern cult and his Jerusalem success.<sup>979</sup> Because of his valiant battle, he was proclaimed 'Imperator' in Judea (Suet., *Tit.* 5.2).

Domitian, on the other hand, had owed his survival from the enemy forces to Isis during the battle between Vitellius and Primus in Rome.<sup>980</sup> He disguised himself as the priest of Isis and mingled among other priests to escape notice (Tac. *Hist.* 3.74; Suet., *Dom.* 1.2).<sup>981</sup> That day, 19 December, reasons Takács,<sup>982</sup> was the *Opalia* festival of the goddess Ops, who in the Greek pantheon was the wife of Saturn and mother of Jupiter, and accordingly could be equated to Isis. Tacitus reports that Domitian, to commemorate his escape, had dedicated a shrine to Jupiter the Preserver and later a temple to Jupiter the Guardian.<sup>983</sup> In 92 C.E., Domitian rebuilt the Iseum on *Campus Martius* (*Iseum Campense*), which was destroyed in 80 C.E. in a large fire. An obelisk in the courtyard of the Iseum,<sup>984</sup> marking the rebuilding, depicts Isis crowning Domitian with the hieroglyphic text: 'The autocrator Domitian loved by Isis and Ptah: may he live like Re'.<sup>985</sup> Domitian's interest in Egyptian religion is reflected in the import of 'sphinxes and cynocephali from the Nile River valley into Rome, along with several obelisks bearing borders of hieroglyphics of great Egyptian pharaohs'.<sup>986</sup> In Kom-er-Resras of Egypt, the inscription on the foundational stones of a temple indicated that the temple was built and dedicated by Domitian to Isis in connection with astronomical worship. It is postulated that the arch to commemorate the restoration of the *Iseum Campense*, featuring the goddess Minerva, was most likely the eastern entrance to the temple structure of Isis and

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<sup>979</sup> Witt, after Bergman, suggests the importance of Titus' crowning at the temple of Apis in Ptah and also of Isis as the 'king-maker'. Witt, 317, n. 25; Jan Bergman, *Ich bin Isis: Studien zum memphitischen Hintergrund der griechischen Isisaretalogien* (Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis. historia religionum 3; Uppsala, [Universitetet Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell], 1968), 92ff, 121ff.

<sup>980</sup> Takács, *Isis and Sarapis*, 99.

<sup>981</sup> Heyob, 27; Witt, 234.

<sup>982</sup> Takács, *Isis and Sarapis*, 99.

<sup>983</sup> Takács, *Isis and Sarapis*, 99.

<sup>984</sup> Turcan, 108 and 106, fig. 3.

<sup>985</sup> Takács, *Isis and Sarapis*, 100. Mathew reads the text as indicating Domitian to be a 'lover of Isis', Matthews, 18.

<sup>986</sup> Matthews, 18. See also Beard, 281-82.

Sarapis.<sup>987</sup> Turcan explains the Minerva figure on the arch by her common attributes to Isis-Neith of Saïs.<sup>988</sup> Back in 88 C.E., Domitian had built or enlarged the Iseum in Beneventum, where he was portrayed as ‘a Pharoah in Egyptian dress’. Obelisks in it declare, ‘O King live for ever!’ and ‘Domitian, living for ever’.<sup>989</sup> Domitian in his role as the beloved of Isis would be in the position of Sarapis, who was Isis’ consort. Though it is not so clear whether Vespasian and Titus had tried to project an elevated position of themselves equivalent to Sarapis,<sup>990</sup> it would not be an unimaginable act in the case of Domitian, who had no qualms about being addressed ‘Our Lord and our God’ (*Dominus et deus noster*).<sup>991</sup> More certainly, “the deities’ Alexandrian and dynastic characteristic” would have been a useful tool to securing the Flavian dynasty in Egypt.<sup>992</sup> The Isiac cult had become a *public sacrum* instead of a *superstitio* with the erection of the Iseum and Serapuem on Campus Martius, either at the end of Gaius’ or at the beginning of Claudius’ reign.<sup>993</sup> The ‘monumental entrance’ to the Iseum on *Campus Martius* in Rome was represented on a Vespasian coin type.<sup>994</sup> The arch Domitian built to commemorate his rebuilding of *Iseum Campense* also appeared during his time on an Alexandrian coin type.<sup>995</sup> Granted, the connection of Domitian to Sarapis was not explicit but implicit, and was aided by the evocative power of connections in ideas: Sarapis, consort of Isis = Domitian, beloved of Isis. Witt conjectures, ‘He thought of himself as the incarnation of Isis’ consort Sarapis, for whom as for her and the companion deities he was ready to build sumptuously.’<sup>996</sup> The temple of the Σεβαστοί in Ephesus, dedicated for the provincial imperial cult in Domitian’s reign, has extant statues of Isis and Attis found in the fragments of the north facade.<sup>997</sup> Isis worship, and that of other Egyptian

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<sup>987</sup> Takács, *Isis and Sarapis*, 101.

<sup>988</sup> Takács, *Isis and Sarapis*, 101.

<sup>989</sup> Witt, 234.

<sup>990</sup> As least not in the case of Vespasian, who was a very practical and down-to-earth emperor. It was only at his death-bed that he laments that he was ‘turning into a god’ (Suet. *Vesp.* 23.4). See Witt, 233.

<sup>991</sup> Suet. *Dom.* 13.2; Witt, 234.

<sup>992</sup> Takács, ‘Alexandria’, 274.

<sup>993</sup> Takács, ‘Alexandria’, 274.

<sup>994</sup> Witt, 174, Pl. 42.

<sup>995</sup> Takács, *Isis and Sarapis*, 100.

<sup>996</sup> Witt, 234.

<sup>997</sup> Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 51, 54.



deities, is likely at ‘a moderate-sized temple on the east-west axis of the agora’, a prominent location in Ephesus. There are findings of a basin and a shaft for water, a small Ammon head, a Harpokrates statuette, an Egyptian terracotta figurine, and a bronze bell possibly from a sistrum at the location.<sup>998</sup>

Both Vespasian and Domitian struck coins in Alexandria with Sarapis called ‘ΖΕΥΞ ΣΑΡΑΠΙΣ’ and ‘ΗΛΙΟΣ ΣΑΡΑΠΙΣ’ assimilating Sarapis with Zeus (Greek counterpart, Jupiter) and Helios, the god of the sun.<sup>999</sup> We saw earlier that Domitian had built a shrine and a temple to Jupiter for his escape dressed as an Isaic priest. Thus, it appears that the concept of Zeus, Jupiter and Sarapis (being equivalent gods) has been the underlying concept of his commemoration. This assimilation helped to promote the legitimacy of an Egyptian religion in Roman clothing. Furthermore, Witt accounts for the possible ‘assimilation of Isis to Athena’s Roman counterpart, Minerva’. He explains:

The hold that Isis won over the Romans arose from her control over warfare, generalship and victory. Already in the third century BC a gem from Campania could show an Isis-Victoria of Alexandrian type with a palm branch in her hand, and according to the Oxyrhynchus *Litany* Isis in the Saite nome was known as Athena...‘the victorious’. The ‘Roman interpretation’, as we can see from Apuleius, identified the goddess who came in triumph from Egypt equally with Minerva and Bellona, the national War Goddess....Along with Minerva, the Italian counterpart of Athena, the Roman Goddess of War merged into the Panthea from Egypt among whose countless titles were ‘triumphali’ and ‘victrix’, the *triumphant* and *victorious*’.<sup>1000</sup>

Besides, Witt notes the proximity of the Iseum on Campus Martius to the Temple of Minerva Chalcidica. In modern times, the Church of S. Maria sopra Minerva lies on the site with a section of the Iseum underneath it.<sup>1001</sup> Witt notes that the second day of the five-day festival of the Quinquatria, the Greater Holiday of Minerva (19-23 March), is an Egyptian festival of Pelusia, which features the inundation of the Nile through Isis’ magic.<sup>1002</sup> Domitian celebrated the Quinquatria annually in his Alban villa, offering wild beast shows, stage plays and oratory contests. He also established

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<sup>998</sup> Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 241, n. 96.

<sup>999</sup> *CNP* 1:41.

<sup>1000</sup> Witt, 122-23.

<sup>1001</sup> Witt., 123.

<sup>1002</sup> Witt., 123.

a college of priests for Minerva (Suet., *Dom.* 4.4). During the quinquennial contest in honour of Jupiter Capitolinus, the image of Minerva was also depicted in his golden crown, with figures of the Capitoline Triad—Jupiter, Juno and Minerva. The college of Flaviales accompanying him wore similar crowns depicting his own image in addition to the images of the Capitoline Triad (Suet., *Dom.* 4.4). Not only is this association between Domitian and Minerva known in Rome, a medallion discovered in a tomb in El-Djem, Africa, depicts Domitian sacrificing to Minerva,<sup>1003</sup> who is in some contexts assimilated to Isis. The goddess Isis has close connections with individual members of the Flavian dynasty, whether alone or in connection with other deities. The harlot sitting on the beast may well have alluded also to the goddess Isis, given her prominence in the Flavian propaganda.

### 2.2.2. Appearance and attire

Isis is associated with the colour red, according to Witt,<sup>1004</sup> but she is also depicted in a combination of colours. Plutarch describes, ‘The garments of Isis are dyed in rainbow colours’ (στολαὶ δ’ αἱ μὲν Ἰσιδος ποικίαι ταῖς βαφαῖς; *Isis and Osiris* 77)<sup>1005</sup>; while seven robes of Isis were mentioned by the Naassenes (Hippol. *Haer.* 5.2). Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses* 11.3 describes Isis’

robe, woven of sheer linen, was of many colours, here shining with white brilliance, there yellow with saffron bloom, there flaming with rosy redness; and what most especially confounded my sight was a deep black cloak gleaming with dark sheen...

Tunica multicolor, bysso tenui pertexta, nunc albo candore lucida, nunc croceo flore lutea, nunc roseo rubore flammida; et quae longe longaeque etiam meum confutabat optutum palla nigerrima splendescens atro nitore...<sup>1006</sup>

The harlot in Revelation is clothed in purple and scarlet (17:4). The colour of the harlot’s dress indicate her image as a Graeco-Roman royalty (such as a queen). Isis associated with red and a variety of colours is also a queen by title. The golden cup or drinking vessel (*cymbium...aureum*; *Metam.* 11.4) that hangs from her arm

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<sup>1003</sup> H. W. Pleket, ‘An Aspect of the Emperor Cult: Imperial Mysteries’, *HTR* 58 (1965): 331-47, see 331.

<sup>1004</sup> Witt, 150; cf. Reinhold Merkelbach. *Roman and Mysterium in der Antike* (München: Beck, 1962), 240; similarly Touilleux, 86.

<sup>1005</sup> Trans.: Turcan, *The Cults*, 111. Greek text: Griffiths (ed.), 240.

<sup>1006</sup> Hanson, LCL.

reminds of the golden cup that the Great Harlot in Revelation holds. What is contained in Isis' cup is a serpent, whereas in the harlot's cup are 'abominations and the impurities of her fornication' (Rev 17:4). Both the forehead of the goddess and the Great Harlot are described. In the case of the former, there lies 'a disc like a mirror—or rather a symbol for the moon—glistened with white light' (*plana rotunditas in modum specula, vel immo argumentum lunae, candidum lumen emicabat; Metam.* 11.3),<sup>1007</sup> whereas in the latter a long derogative name (Rev 17:5). Though the Great Harlot is not exactly like Isis in her attire, she like Isis has a resplendence of a richly adorned goddess (17:4). The great wonder (θαῦμα; cf. θαυμάζω; 17:6) of John at the sight of her in a vision is not unlike that of devotees marvelling at the epiphany of a goddess during the ἐποπτεία, the highest grade of initiation into the Eleusinian mysteries,<sup>1008</sup> except that John is not a devotee, neither is the Great Harlot totally admirable in her traits.

### 2.2.3. A queen who is widowed

Isis takes the highest position among gods: 'mightiest of deities' (*summa numinum; Metam.* 11.5) and calls herself 'queen Isis' (*regina Isis; Metam.* 11.5), as does the Great Harlot in Revelation, who declares proudly: 'I sit as a Queen; I am not a widow' (κάθημαι βασίλισσα καὶ χήρα οὐκ εἰμι; Rev 18:7). But in fact, calamities will befall her (18:8). These could include widowhood. Queen Isis experienced widowhood. According to different versions of the myth, her brother-husband, Osiris, had either accidentally drowned or was murdered by Seth, his enemy.<sup>1009</sup> A long search for her husband's corpse ensued. The earliest inherent portrayal of Isis was that of a mourner.<sup>1010</sup> The myth of Isis in the Graeco-Roman world was further promoted by Plutarch's *Essay on Isis and Orisis*, written for an Isiac priestess at Delphi.<sup>1011</sup> The cult of Isis became very prominent and widespread in the Roman era

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<sup>1007</sup> Hanson, LCL.

<sup>1008</sup> Cf. Cheslyn Jones (et. al.), *The Study of Liturgy* (rev. ed.; London: SPCK, 1992), 84. On epiphany, see Christine Sourvinou-Inwood, *Tragedy and Athenian Religion* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2003), 248, 460-62.

<sup>1009</sup> For different versions of the myth, see Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Goddesses and the Divine Feminine: A Western Religious History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 64-69.

<sup>1010</sup> Witt, 36-7.

<sup>1011</sup> Witt, 39.

throughout the empire.<sup>1012</sup> Apuleius' *The Golden Ass* could also have promoted the Isis cult to the public. In particular, Domitia (Domitian's wife),<sup>1013</sup> and both Agrippina the Elder and Younger were assimilated with Isis.<sup>1014</sup>

#### 2.2.4. Affinity with sea-farers

A significant point in Rev 18 is the devotion and lament 'of every shipmaster and every seafarer, sailor and whose trade is on the sea' (πᾶς κυβερνήτης καὶ πᾶς ὁ ἐπὶ τόπων πλέων καὶ ναῦται καὶ ὅσοι τὴν θάλασσαν ἐργάζονται) towards the great harlot/city (18:17-19). Goddess Isis is interestingly known, among other titles, 'guardian and guide of seas' (ἐπίτροπον καὶ ὁδηγὸν θαλασ<σ>ίων; *P.Oxy.* 11.1380.121-22).<sup>1015</sup> An Isis aretology from Cyme in Asia Minor also attests to this, speaking of Isis' claim to be the 'queen/lady of seamanship' (ναυτιλίας...κυρία).<sup>1016</sup> She was 'regarded as a Sea-goddess and the patroness of sailors' by people living near coastal areas.<sup>1017</sup> Sailors and merchants propagated her cult across the Mediterranean.<sup>1018</sup> A lament for the goddess, if she were fallen, would naturally be voiced by sailors and merchants and all who live by the sea (Rev 18:17-19). In a vision, Lucius sees the goddess rising out of the sea (*Metam.* 11.3.5-8). An annual festival of Isis was closely related to marine navigation, in which a brand-new ship was sacrificed to her 'as a first-offering of the season's trade' (primitias commeatus libant; *Metam.* 11.5). On 5 March, a procession of priests and layman proceeded to the seashore for the festival of sailing Isis' ship (*Navigium Isidis* or Πλοιαφέσια).<sup>1019</sup> An account of this hearty procession is described in Apuleius'

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<sup>1012</sup> Griffiths (ed.), 253.

<sup>1013</sup> Mikocki, 53.

<sup>1014</sup> Mikocki, 37 and 41.

<sup>1015</sup> Bernard P. Grenfell and Arthur S. Hunt (eds. and trans.), *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri* (Egypt Exploration Fund Graeco-Roman Branch; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1898-), XI.197.

<sup>1016</sup> Meyer (ed.), 172-73; cf. Frederick C. Grant, *Hellenistic Religions: The Age of Syncretism* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Educational, 1953, repr. 1980), 130-33, see 133. Greek text: Bergman, 301-3.

<sup>1017</sup> E. A. Wallis Budge, *Osiris: The Egyptian of Resurrection* (New York: University Books, 1961), 287.

<sup>1018</sup> Horst R. Moehring, 'The Persecution of the Jews and the Adherents of the Isis cult at Rome A.D. 19', *NovT* (1959): 293-304, see 293.

<sup>1019</sup> Witt, 98. See also Turcan, *The Cults*, 114-16; Griffiths (ed.), 50.

*Metamorphoses* (11.8-11, 16). The ship was loaded fully with votive gifts.<sup>1020</sup> On the sail of the ship was a prayer in hieroglyphics for successful navigation in the new season.<sup>1021</sup> In ancient Egypt, a procession from bank to bank during the inundation of the Nile provided the prototype of the festival in the Graeco-Roman world.<sup>1022</sup> The myth of Isis Pelagia, whose tears in search of Osiris had filled the Nile, formed the basis for the festival. She had crossed the Mediterranean to bring back the body of Osiris to Egypt.<sup>1023</sup> Pausanias (second century C.E.) mentions a sanctuary of Isis along with Poseidon, among other deities, at Cenchreae where Apuleius' account of the festival took place.<sup>1024</sup> Coin types in the period of Diocletian to Valentinian II (fourth century) highlight Isis' role as a maritime deity.<sup>1025</sup> Artifacts of Isis devotion in the form of boat-shaped lamps are also extant.<sup>1026</sup> Interestingly, Aphrodite is also a patron goddess of the sea-faring and receives votives from sailors and fishermen. 'Εὐπλοία' (giving good sailing) is one of her epithets.<sup>1027</sup>

#### 2.2.5. Sexual allegations

In Rev 17:5, the mother figure is depicted in a derogatory sense: ἡ μήτηρ τῶν πορνῶν καὶ τῶν βδελυγμάτων τῆς γῆς. Certain rituals of the mysteries of the Isis cult were morally suspect and perhaps could be alluded to, in part, by the phrase, 'the earth's abominations' (βδελυγμάτων τῆς γῆς). Isis is a figure of different feminine images: a 'chaste and loving wife and mother', but also 'a lady of easy virtue, countenancing the sexual enjoyments and love-making'. A mixture of contrasts is seen in her:<sup>1028</sup>

In her the believer could discover the warm affection of the bereaved wife, the tenderness of the mother suckling her baby as Isis the *Kourotrophos*, the concern of the midwife for the safe delivery of women in childbirth, the sexual passion symbolized by the erect

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<sup>1020</sup> Witt, 177.

<sup>1021</sup> Witt, 168.

<sup>1022</sup> Witt, 165.

<sup>1023</sup> Witt, 166.

<sup>1024</sup> Witt, 177.

<sup>1025</sup> Witt, 179 and pl. 62 and 65.

<sup>1026</sup> Witt, pls. 37 and 40.

<sup>1027</sup> F. Graf, 'Aphrodite', in *DDD*, 64-68, see 66.

<sup>1028</sup> Witt, 138.

phallus and by the legend that she had played the harlot for ten years  
at Tyre...<sup>1029</sup>

Roman aversion towards the cult in Rome has been attributed to its moral license. In 58 B.C.E., the cult of Isis was forbidden in Rome to restrain ‘the vices of...base and lascivious religion’ (*turpium et otiosarum superstitionum vitia*<sup>1030</sup>) of Isis, Sarapis and Harpocrates.<sup>1031</sup> In a hymn to Isis (hymn 5), Mesomedes (at the time of Hadrian) alluding to mystery rituals involving

a wedding in the netherworld (Persephone), the birth of a child,  
“unspeakable fire” (in the Telesterion), and the “harvest of  
Kronos”...that is cutting the ear of grain...<sup>1032</sup>

There are cryptic references to a underground marriage, childbirth and castration. Castration is indicated by mowing ears of grain.<sup>1033</sup> One does not know what really ensued in the rites, nor whether they were enacted literally or symbolically. The cutting of an ear of grain could refer to the symbol of Attis’ castration,<sup>1034</sup> though his connection with the Isaic cult is not clear. This and the wedding underground bear sexual connotations.

There were fewer accusations made by Christian writers against the cult of Isis than against that of Cybele and the Eleusinian rites.<sup>1035</sup> Hoyeb notes the accusation by Epiphanius (fourth century) that speaks of incestuous marriages between her adherents on the grounds of Isis’ love for her brother Osiris. As mentioned, Isis was said to be a harlot in the city of Tyre for ten years (Epiph. *Anchoratus* 104).<sup>1036</sup> Among the pagan writers, however, the cult of Isis has frequently been associated with immoral sexual practices in ‘a great number of handbooks of antiquity and works on ancient religion’.<sup>1037</sup> Juvenal connects the

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<sup>1029</sup> Witt, 138.

<sup>1030</sup> Tert. *Apol.* 6.8; Oehler (ed.), I.136.

<sup>1031</sup> Moehring, 295; Witt, 222-23.

<sup>1032</sup> Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults*, 160, n. 116 and 81.

<sup>1033</sup> Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults*, 81, 94.

<sup>1034</sup> Cf. Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults*, 81.

<sup>1035</sup> See Turcan, *The Cults*, 120.

<sup>1036</sup> Hoyeb, 124; Susan Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves* (New York: Pimlico, 1995), 222.

<sup>1037</sup> Heyob, 111.

sanctuaries or temples of Isis with immorality and seduction.<sup>1038</sup> Anubis, the jackal-headed god, in the cult of Isis forgives wayward wives of their adulteries for a fee.<sup>1039</sup>

After ancient texts, modern commentators commonly charge the cult with immorality.<sup>1040</sup> But Matthews comments on ‘the general tendency in Roman literature to fuse subversive religious and sexual activity’.<sup>1041</sup> Likewise, Sharon Heyob cautions against reading the Isiac religion in bad light excessively based on these sources, since ‘the charge of immorality leveled against the Isis temples was also made against the temples of other gods and against all public gathering places’. She points out that Juvenal (*Sat.* 9.22-25) derides the temples of Isis as much as that of the Great Mother and of Ceres.<sup>1042</sup> Besides the temple of Isis, Ovid *Am.* 3.633-37 implicates the theatre, the temple of Bona Dea, the porticos of Pompey, Octavia, and Livia, and of the Danaids in the temple of Apollo on the Palatine Hill, the temples of Venus, the synagogues of the Jews and even the law courts to be places men might meet with women.<sup>1043</sup> It would ‘be unjust’, Heyob’s words, ‘to attribute more moral offenses to the Isis cult than to Roman society and its institutions as a whole’.<sup>1044</sup> Walter Burkert describes the general austere impression of the cult:

The picture presented by the cult of Isis is a strange one. There are no overt sexual symbols. Shaved heads and linen clothes, processions, prayers, water, incense, and sistrums all look severe and puritan; if the sacred water of the Nile is identical with the procreative power of the rediscovered Osiris, this is definitely the most diluted form of sexual symbolism.<sup>1045</sup>

Arguing for the purity of the Isis cult, Heyob observes the integrity of an Isiac priest who imposed exile on himself for nearly succumbing to evil, being mesmerized by the charm of a frequent Thracian devotee (Heliod, *Aeth.* 2.25.1-6). Heyob names

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<sup>1038</sup> E.g., *Sat.* 6.488-89; 9.22-25; see Heyob, 114.

<sup>1039</sup> *Juv. Sat.* 6.535-36.

<sup>1040</sup> See Heyob, 111, n. 2 for a long list of references.

<sup>1041</sup> Matthews, 22.

<sup>1042</sup> Heyob, 115.

<sup>1043</sup> Heyob, 116.

<sup>1044</sup> Heyob, 116.

<sup>1045</sup> Walter Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults*, 107.

examples of chaste women followers of Isis found on epigraphic descriptions.<sup>1046</sup> Tertullian cites certain chaste widows who were servants of Isis as examples for Christians to emulate. They kept away from sexual relations with men.<sup>1047</sup> Even if the cult of Isis was ideologically chaste, misuse of the cult for sexual fancies of devotees was possible. However, one event reveals something about the legitimacy of cultic sex with a god in the Isiac rite of incubation.<sup>1048</sup> During the reign of Tiberius, a Roman matron of high moral integrity, named Paulina, considered it a great privilege to be summoned to sleep with the god Anubis for a night in the temple of Isis in Rome. Her husband, Saturninus, also of excellent morals, consented to the matter. Little was Paulina aware that the invitation was a plot set up by her freedwoman, who had bribed the Isiac priests to enable Mundus, much in love with her, to fulfill his desires in the guise of Anubis. Upon investigation of the plot, the emperor ordered the priests of Isis to be crucified and the temple of Isis destroyed.<sup>1049</sup> The immoral character of some Isiac priests to accept bribes and facilitate the plot is evident from the event, notwithstanding Josephus' possible apologetic motivation in his narration.<sup>1050</sup> We see here an instance of the Isis cult clearly used for acts of immorality under a cloak of deception to beguile the willing initiate.

The cult seems to have been respectable to be able to attract such adherents as Paulina and Mundus; Paulina had refused Mundus' financial offer of two hundred thousand Attic drachmae for spending one night with him. The stress on the excellent morals of both Paulina and Saturninus and their positive reception (without any consternation) towards a one-night stay in the temple of Isis involving sexual participation (*A.J.* 18.73), makes it probable that sexual encounter with a deity was a common part of the Isis ritual. It would have caused an outcry, especially on the part

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<sup>1046</sup> Heyob, 120-23.

<sup>1047</sup> Tert. *Exh. cast.* 13; *Mon.* 17; *Jejun.* 16; Hoyeb, 126.

<sup>1048</sup> Incubation is often practiced by the worshipper, who awaits the appearance of the goddess or god. Benko, *The Virgin Goddess*, 51

<sup>1049</sup> Joseph. *A. J.* 18.65-80; Robert Samuel Rogers, 'Fulvia Paulina C. Sentii Saturnini', *AJP* 53 (1932): 252-256, see 253-54.

<sup>1050</sup> W. C. Unik, 'Flavius Josephus and the Mysteries', in Vermaseren (ed.), 244-79, see 257. By juxtaposing the accounts of an apostate Jewish swindler and corrupted priests of Isis together, Josephus could have wished to highlight the distinctive reasons for the expulsion of the Jewish religion and the Isis cult, which were also associated together in other accounts (*Tac. Ann.* 2.85 and *Suet. Tib.* 36). See Unik, 254-58.



of the husband, if it were not an acceptable norm.<sup>1051</sup> Josephus could have, as suggested, highlighted the offence of the Isis priests to present the Jews, also expelled, in a better light (*A.J.* 18.81-84).<sup>1052</sup> It has been questioned why Tacitus (*Ann.* 2.85.5) and Suetonius (*Tib.* 36) had not mentioned the Isiac scandal while narrating that of the Jews.<sup>1053</sup> Would this cast doubt on the veracity of Josephus' account of the Isiac scandal? It was unlikely that Josephus had created a scandal that concerned a very popular cult and named high-standing people as rogue and victim if there had been no basis to it. Paulina, the victim, was of noble birth and had a great reputation (*A.J.* 18.66). Mundus, the trickster, was high in the equestrian order (*A.J.* 18.67). Whatever the veracity of the account, it had tainted the public image of the Isis cult.

Hoyeb argues that the sexual abstinence of women before participation in the Isis rites contradicts accusations of immorality in the cult. Husbands complain of their mistress' ten-day sexual abstinence before participating in Isis rites: Tibullus' Delia (1.3.25-26) and Propertius' Cynthia<sup>1054</sup> (2.33.2; 2.33.17; 2.28.62; 4.5.34) both observed the abstinence. Propertius calls Isis a bitter goddess for keeping lovers apart (2.33.5-6). To Ovid, Isis signified an empty bed on certain nights (*Am.* 3.9.33-34).<sup>1055</sup> Heyob observes that the same writers who accused the Isis cult of immorality also brought to attention 'the rules of chastity'.<sup>1056</sup> Burkert, however, notes that 'the very prominence of the sexual abstinence in the preparation for Isis ceremonies draws attention to a center that is veiled'.<sup>1057</sup> He refers to an epigram praising a priest of Isis

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<sup>1051</sup> Different from Hoyeb, who sees the foolish decision of Paulina and Saturnius scarcely believable, I see Paulina and Saturnius decision as fully rational and acceptable through the religious trappings of union with a god. Hoyeb, 117. For a discussion of the event, see Moehring, 293-303.

<sup>1052</sup> See Matthews, 22.

<sup>1053</sup> See Hoyeb, 118.

<sup>1054</sup> See also John F. Miller, 'Propertius' Tirade against Isis (2.33a)', *CJ* 77 (1981): 104-111, see 104, 108.

<sup>1055</sup> Heyob, 116-17.

<sup>1056</sup> Heyob, 116.

<sup>1057</sup> Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults*, 107. In a Greek festival of Attica Thesmophoria, reflected in the comedy of Aristophanes, women had to abstain from sexual relations for nine days as an act of piety, so that, according to the plot of the priests, they might participate in the erotic orgies uninhibited. Licht, 107.

for having set ‘the bed [δέμνιον], covered with linen, which is unspeakable for the profane’. Burkert suggests that δέμνιον does not refer to a dining couch.<sup>1058</sup>

So how does one make sense of the contradictory evidence of chastity and sexual accusations of the cult? It may be, as Benko cautions, that some accusations were malicious slander from adherents of other cults.<sup>1059</sup> Besides, what was considered sacred and chaste need not necessarily preclude cultic sex or eroticism.

Pompeii provides proof of the existence of two contrasted elements in the cult of Isis, the spiritual and holy and the frankly erotic. The Egyptian tradition has phallic worship as its core and a Christian writer can even allege that on her visit to Tyre Isis played the harlot for ten whole years. So too the Roman poet Juvenal writes about the shrines of ‘the bawd of Isis’, a reminder that the shrines at Pompeii are not far from the brothels. This side of Isiacism must neither be minimized nor judged too harshly. On a phallus, as a fertility emblem, a prayer could be written. In the scene where the mummified Osiris receives adoration is included an ithyphallic idol, a crude but typical symbol of the doctrine of Life in Death. In another panoramic scene the temple of Isis is depicted with a statue of Priapus before it. This again can be treated as the cult’s fertility emblem....<sup>1060</sup>

He continues:

For any worshipper of Isis, sex was not just dirt. One might seek redemption from sexual errors, like Lucius supplicating Isis at Cenchreae in the novel by Apuleius. But the sexual side of life was not utterly taboo.... In the Egyptian quarter at Delos silver images have been discovered of wombs and genitalia as supplicatory offerings to the nativity goddess. At Pompeii itself the purity of Isis as ruler of home and family can be inferred, and her chastity is stressed when she is associated with the Italian equivalent of Artemis, Diana. Yet there also Isis can embrace Venus/Aphrodite as she did Harthor in Egypt....What the ardent lover in Rome says to the guardian of her girl friend—‘Don’t ask what can happen in the Temple of linen-clad Isis’—could have been said with the like implications at Pompeii.<sup>1061</sup>

The Isis in Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses* is specified with a significant trait of Aphrodite who is born from the foam of the sea: she rises from out of the waves

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<sup>1058</sup> Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults*, 107. For the epigram, see Sencer Şahin, ‘Griechische Epigramme aus dem südlichen Propontisgebiet’, in Margreet B. de Boer and T. A. Edridge (eds.), *Hommages à Maarten J. Vermaseren*, vol. 3 (3 vols.; EPRO 68; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978), 997-1002, see 997-98.

<sup>1059</sup> Benko, *The Virgin Goddess*, 51.

<sup>1060</sup> Witt, 85.

<sup>1061</sup> Witt, 85-86.

(11.3.5-8).<sup>1062</sup> Assimilation of the two goddesses could perhaps have contributed to the sexual misdemeanour of the Isis cult. On the whole, we see a mixed picture presented by the Isis cult. On the one hand, there was a certain outward respectability to it. On the other hand, much suspicion was created by the loud derision by pagan writers. A few loud allegations (factual or fictitious) could have shaped the public view of the goddess, from which the harlot imagery in Revelation could have drawn upon.

Love spells also existed in the name of Isis, modelled after her use of magic in luring Osiris back from his adultery with Mephtys. The erotic nature of it is evident in the following love charm:

Every flaming, every cooking, every heating, every steaming, and every sweating that you (masc.) will cause in this flaming stove, you (will) cause in the heart, in the liver, (in) the area of the navel, and in the belly of NN...until...she puts what is in her hand into my hand, what is in her mouth into my mouth what is in her belly onto my belly, what is in her female parts onto my male parts—quickly, quickly! Immediately, immediately!<sup>1063</sup>

Similarly, magic is practiced by the Great Harlot in Revelation (18:23).

#### 2.2.6. Isis in the face of the Great Harlot

So how does the goddess Isis connect with the Great Harlot in Revelation? Isis rides prominently on a symbolical Roman beast of the Flavian rule, which publicly subscribed to the Isis cult in terms of architecture, coinage, festivity and ideology. As with the cult of Cybele, the cult of Isis was common in Asia Minor, where the seven churches were located. Her cult spread throughout the Mediterranean through sailors and merchants. Among her many epithets, she is called ‘Queen Isis’ (cf. Rev 18:7). As the guardian and guide of seas,<sup>1064</sup> Isis Pelagia<sup>1065</sup> and patroness of sailors, the

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<sup>1062</sup> Karageorghis, xv, 5.

<sup>1063</sup> Meyer (ed.), 174-75. Text (PGM IV 94-153) mostly in Coptic: Karl Preisendanz (ed. and trans.), *Papyri Graecae magicae: die griechischen Zauberpapyri* (vol. 1; Leipzig : B.G. Teubner, 1928), 70-76.

For analysis of the spell, see Marvin W. Meyer, ‘The Love Spell of PGM IV.94-153: Introduction and Structure’, in Tito Orlandi and Frederik Wisse (eds), *Acts of the Second International Congress of Coptic Studies* (Rome: C.I.M., 1985), 193-201.

<sup>1064</sup> *P.Oxy.* 11.1380.

<sup>1065</sup> Isis is especially worshipped as ‘Isis Pelagia’ in Corinth. Smith, 229-31.

lament by sea-farers in Rev 18:17 would have made some sense if Isis was a representation of the Great Harlot. Besides on the beast, the harlot sits on ‘many waters’ (ὕδατων πολλῶν; Rev 17:1), possibly denoting the wide reception of the goddess around the Mediterranean. She is also called the ‘Mother of the Gods’—an epithet used predominantly for Cybele. Assimilation with Aphrodite might have encouraged an orgiastic element in the Isis’ rites, in addition to the eroticism already contained within the Egyptian cult of Isis. Whatever the case, the sexual allegations of her cultic practices would have tainted the public perception of the cult. Isis as a harlot for ten years, according to tradition, would be a point of connection with the Great Harlot, though her cult presents a mixed image of chastity and sexual license. The Great Harlot is called a mother of ‘prostitutes’ (πόρναι, 17:5). Prostitution was not normally associated to the cult of Isis, though alleged sexual immorality was. But assimilation with Aphrodite could have encouraged sexual license in the cult. Less strikingly in terms of appearance, the Isis of Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses* is dressed elaborately (11.4) as is the Great Harlot of Revelation. The former is depicted variously in red and in multi-colour, while the latter is in scarlet and purple (Rev 17:4). Both their foreheads are ‘adorned’ with a disc and a derogatory name respectively, and both have a cup by hand. The harlot in Revelation is drunk from the blood of the saints and martyrs (17:6), yet murder does not seem to be an accusation of the Isis cult. We may see this aspect surfacing in connection with some other entity (such as Rome) in the harlot’s representation.

## 2.3 Dea Roma

The term Roma had meant the city Rome or the inhabitants of Rome.<sup>1066</sup> It was only in the Augustan age that she took on the identity as goddess,<sup>1067</sup> as the ‘deification of *populus Romanus*’.<sup>1068</sup> Roma was a ‘sacred link’, using Ronald Mellor’s term,<sup>1069</sup> of loyal ties between Rome and the provinces having her cult. She was sometimes jointly worshipped in temples with other deities in the sense of homage paid to Rome as benefactor.<sup>1070</sup> For example, a treaty in 130 B.C.E. between Pergamum and Rome

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<sup>1066</sup> Ronald Mellor, *ΘΕΑ ΡΩΜΗ: The Worship of the Goddess Roma in the Greek World* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1975), 199.

<sup>1067</sup> Mellor, *ΘΕΑ ΡΩΜΗ*, 199.

<sup>1068</sup> Mellor, *ΘΕΑ ΡΩΜΗ*, 199.

<sup>1069</sup> Mellor, *ΘΕΑ ΡΩΜΗ*, 128.

<sup>1070</sup> Mellor, *ΘΕΑ ΡΩΜΗ*, 129; also 128-31 on joint cults.

decreed Roma to receive sacrifice together with other deities of Pergamum, such as Demeter and Kore.<sup>1071</sup> Mellor points out that most of the locations addressed in the seven letters of Revelation had ‘cults, festivals or even temples dedicated to Roma’ during the time of the book’s composition.<sup>1072</sup> James Knight documents festivals to Dea Roma in Asia:

[T]he Koinon of Asia celebrated *Romaia* in Pergamum, as well as in other principal cities of Asia Minor such as Sardis and Smyrna (Mellor 1975, 81-82, 167-68). By the reign of Tiberius, the joint festival honouring Roma and the emperor, *Sabasta Romaia*, was celebrated in a number of cities in Asia Minor (Mellor 1975, 168). Inscriptions confirm the celebration of *Romaia* in Pergamum (*IPergamum* 269; *IGR* IV 498; *IPriene* 105) and in Smyrna (*IDelphes* 550, ca. III CE), as well as the presence of the *agnothete* [*sic*] (the director of the contests honouring Roma and emperors) in Smyrna (*ISmyrna* 591, ca. 54-68 CE; *IGR* IV 1410) and in Sardis (*ISardBR* 8 = *IGR* 1756).<sup>1073</sup>

The priests of Roma also held important governing functions in cities, with various civic and administrative duties.<sup>1074</sup> The active presence of the Roma cult in cities of Asia continued up to the third century C.E.<sup>1075</sup> Dea Roma assumed characteristics of other goddesses. Mellor writes:

The goddess was represented as a traditional divinity. Sometimes a warrior, sometimes a mother-figure, she had always to draw on the attributes of other gods since she herself has no history, no myth.<sup>1076</sup>

She was portrayed on coins with characteristics of other goddesses, such as Athena, Amazon, Cybele or Minerva.<sup>1077</sup>

### 2.3.1 Dea Roma and the Great Harlot’s depiction

Certain coins in the time of the Flavians reveal similarities between Roma and the harlot in Rev 17. A bronze sestertius of Vespasian struck in 71 C.E.,<sup>1078</sup> likely

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<sup>1071</sup> Mellor, *ΘΕΑ ΡΩΜΗ*, 157.

<sup>1072</sup> Mellor, *ΘΕΑ ΡΩΜΗ*, 127.

<sup>1073</sup> Knight, 114.

<sup>1074</sup> See Knight, 115.

<sup>1075</sup> Knight, 116.

<sup>1076</sup> Mellor, *ΘΕΑ ΡΩΜΗ*, 200 and n. 4. As warrior: Hor. *Carm.* 3.3.44; as mother: Prop. 2.22.39.

<sup>1077</sup> Mellor, *ΘΕΑ ΡΩΜΗ*, 162-64.

<sup>1078</sup> Robinson, 482.

inspired by a marble relief,<sup>1079</sup> corresponds in some aspects to the harlot seated on seven heads of the beast, which are also seven hills (a striking correspondence to Rev 17:3, 9):

The Amazon Roma sits on the right on Rome's Seven Hills, an eagle-topped scepter held vertically on her left knee right hand behind the head. Father Tiber reclines to the left on smaller rocks at the extreme right; the Wolf and Twins appear on the ground line before the Seven Hills.<sup>1080</sup>

In the bronze sestertius of Vespasian, the Amazonian Roma sits on seven hills like the Great Harlot in Revelation. The accompanying Wolf and Twins in the outdoor setting of the hills in the Vespasian coin bespeak of the 'wilderness' location of the harlot. Aune points out a subversive reading of the iconography of the wolf, which in Latin (*lupas*) could take on the connotation of 'prostitute'.<sup>1081</sup> The military attire of Amazonian Roma (of short tunic),<sup>1082</sup> no doubt, appears different from the Great Harlot dressed in rich array of purple, scarlet, gold, precious stones and pearls (Rev 17:4). Interestingly, a gem paste with a figure called 'Roma' bears a better connection to the possible attire of the harlot in Revelation. The 'Roma' in it is dressed

in high-girt chiton and long himation, is seated to the left on a throne with arms carved into lion's heads and paws; her left hand rests on a shield, and the right holds the parazonium in the usual diagonal position in the crook of the arm.<sup>1083</sup>

This Roma seated on a throne with arm carved into a lion appears to have incorporated the image of Cybele, who is often depicted on a throne with a pair of attending lions on either side.<sup>1084</sup> This Roma's chiton and himation would be a closer resemblance than the short Amazon tunic to the harlot's affluent attire. In fact, classicist statues of Cybele, the Mother of the Gods, are often portrayed in a 'richly

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<sup>1079</sup> Cornelius C. Vermeule, *The Goddess Roma in the Art of the Roman Empire* (Cambridge, Mass: Spink, 1959), 41; cf. Robinson, 482-83.

<sup>1080</sup> Vermeule, *The Goddess Roma*, 41 and pl. III, 24.

<sup>1081</sup> Knight 105; David E. Aune, *Revelation 6-16* (WBC 52B; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 925.

<sup>1082</sup> Robinson, 482.

<sup>1083</sup> Vermeule, *The Goddess Roma*, 66.

<sup>1084</sup> Philip A. Harland, 'Christ-Bearers and Fellow Initiates: Local Cultural Life and Christian Identity in Ignatius' Letters', *J ECS* 11 (2003): 481-99, see 496.

decorated robe',<sup>1085</sup> possibly in chiton and himation, which constitute a common attire of draped figures in antiquity. Vermeule reckons that the *parazonium* (an eagle-crested sceptre) may bear association to either Athena or Minerva-Virtus.<sup>1086</sup> Vermeule dates the paste probably to early second century C.E.<sup>1087</sup> The interesting fact about this Roma is that it also incorporates characteristics of Cybele and some other goddesses.

### 2.3.2. Roma, Cybele and the Flavians

An association of Roma and Cybele is already made in the time of Augustus in Virgil's *Aeneid* 6, 781-87. Mellor writes:

The comparison between Roma and Cybele...is functioning at several levels. Roma encloses her hills with a wall while Cybele...is traditionally depicted with the mural crown. The reference to Cybele as the *Magna Mater*...is balanced by Roma's corresponding joy in the future generations of heroes she will bring forth....Cybele appears elsewhere in the 'Aeneid' as the patron of the Trojans, as when she entreats her son Jupiter to protect Aeneas' band on its voyage to Italy (12, 82 ff). So Roma as goddess is associated with the nurturing and protective forces of the great mother of the gods.<sup>1088</sup>

Indeed, both Roma and Cybele were Asiatic goddesses.<sup>1089</sup> The cult of Roma has its origins in ruler cults common in the Greek world.<sup>1090</sup> Smyrna has the earliest attested cult of Roma. After the establishment of Roma's temple in Smyrna in 195 B.C.E., the cult of Roma spread throughout the Greek world.<sup>1091</sup> Vespasian is second to Augustus in the development of provincial ruler worship in the empire. In 69-70 C.E., a type struck at Taracco portrays Roma 'offering a Victory to Vespasian'.<sup>1092</sup> Another type of Roma kneeling before Vespasian is circulated in 70-73 C.E.<sup>1093</sup> This

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<sup>1085</sup> Benko, *The Virgin Goddess*, 106.

<sup>1086</sup> Vermeule, *The Goddess Roma*, 66-67.

<sup>1087</sup> Vermeule, *The Goddess Roma*, 67.

<sup>1088</sup> Ronald Mellor, 'The Goddess Roma', in *ANRW* II, 17.2 (1981): 950-1030, see 1006.

<sup>1089</sup> Mellor, 'The Goddess Roma', 1007.

<sup>1090</sup> Mellor, 'The Goddess Roma', 956.

<sup>1091</sup> Mellor, 'The Goddess Roma', 956.

<sup>1092</sup> Duncan Fishwick, 'The Development of Provincial Ruler Worship in the Western Roman Empire', in *ANRW* II, 16.2 (1978): 1201-53, see 1226. *RIC*, no. 265, cf. no. 385.

<sup>1093</sup> Fishwick, 1219.

coin has a special significance in that Roma is depicting as endorsing the Flavian rule at the beginning of the new dynasty. Apart from coins and gems, Roma is depicted ‘beside Titus in his triumphal procession...on a relief in his Arch in the Forum’.<sup>1094</sup> On the relief facing the arch of Titus that depicts his victory over Jerusalem, ‘Titus stands in a four-horse chariot, with the goddess Roma leading the horses, and Victory crowning him with a laurel wreath’.<sup>1095</sup> In the Palazzo della Cancelleria in Rome dated to Domitian’s time, we see in Panel A,

a *profectio* of Domitian with the emperor being led by a winged Victory, Mars in full armor and Minerva. Roma in a plumed helmet with a short tunic and bared breast walks beside and just behind the emperor gently guiding him with her hand on his elbow.<sup>1096</sup>

Roma holds a shield in her right arm.<sup>1097</sup> Panel B depicts Roma ‘presiding over the *adventus* of an emperor’. She holds a spear in her left hand.<sup>1098</sup>

Vespasian actively promoted the imperial cult in ‘three great senatorial provinces of the West: Gallia Narbonensis, Baetica and Africa Proconsularis’ to strengthen the loyalty to his rule and his dynasty.<sup>1099</sup> These three senatorial provinces established their provincial cults during this time.<sup>1100</sup> However, there is no archeological trace of goddess Roma in their foundations.<sup>1101</sup> According to Mellor’s study, she is also not attested in other minor provincial cults of the Vespasian period.<sup>1102</sup> It seems, however, that the goddess Roma is featured quite commonly in the coins, gems and friezes of the Flavian period. As some scholars, I suggest Dea

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<sup>1094</sup> Mellor, ‘The Goddess Roma’, 1013.

<sup>1095</sup> MacKendrick, 296.

<sup>1096</sup> Mellor, ‘The Goddess Roma’, 1013-14 and pl. II. For a posited *profectio*, see Hugh Last, ‘On the Flavian Reliefs from the Palazzo della Cancelleria’, *JRS* 38, Parts 1 and 2 (1948): 9-14, see 12-14 and pl. 1 for photographs of the friezes.

<sup>1097</sup> Mellor, ‘The Goddess Roma’, 1014. Some think that she is Bellona, the war goddess. MacKendrick, 301.

<sup>1098</sup> Mellor, ‘The Goddess Roma’, 1013-14. An alternative context for the relief depicting the meeting of Vespasian with Domitian around 70 C.E. has also been suggested. Last, 10-12.

<sup>1099</sup> Mellor, ‘The Goddess Roma’, 993, 996.

<sup>1100</sup> Mellor, ‘The Goddess Roma’, 995.

<sup>1101</sup> Mellor, ‘The Goddess Roma’, 996.

<sup>1102</sup> Mellor, ‘The Goddess Roma’, 996-97.



Roma to be a facet of the Great Harlot in Revelation.<sup>1103</sup> Naturally, goddess Roma goes well with the commonly accepted city identity of the harlot as Rome.

### 3. Conclusion

This study shows that in addition to the previously recognised referents as cities (Rome and/or Jerusalem), the harlot has faces of tyrannical queens and a combination of popular goddesses of the Graeco-Roman world. I have singled out powerful empresses, such as Agrippina the Younger and Valeria Messalina, as well as popular or well-known Graeco-Roman goddesses, such as Isis, Cybele with Aphrodite, and Dea Roma for the comparison. Though not all the queens and goddesses identified play equal roles in the depiction, they are seen to be a part of the harlot's overall polyvalent construction. In such a polyvalent representation, each referent jostles with another for prominence in the reader's mind. Knight writes befittingly:

The notion of polyvalence acknowledges that symbolic texts, such as vision reports, operate on different levels of meaning, affecting the reader with a synergy of historical, literary, mythical, archetypal allusions.<sup>1104</sup>

An anchor to a historical woman, Agrippina the Younger, in the face of the Great Harlot is secured by Agrippina's direct connection with Nero (the beast in its first life). However, the representation of the Great Harlot as a wicked queen also incorporates the image of another powerful empress in the first century, Valeria Messalina. The assimilation of empresses and princesses to goddesses is a well-known custom in the imperial world. Thus, the subsequent reading of goddesses together with imperial women is not surprising. One observes correspondences in characteristics between the Great Harlot and some popular goddesses in the imperial world: Cybele with Aphrodite, Isis and Roma. However, not one of the goddesses is exclusively portrayed in the depiction. We saw the frequent assimilation of major goddesses with one another. In a sense, Cybele (with the assimilated Aphrodite) and Isis were goddesses-queens. In mythological tradition, Aphrodite is the mother of the founder of Rome (*Homeric Hymn* 5). Cybele with her mural crown is the protector of cities. She becomes the protectress of Rome. Goddess Roma as a personification of

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<sup>1103</sup> Mellor, *ΘΕΑ ΡΩΜΗ*, 127.

<sup>1104</sup> Knight, 106.

Rome (Verg. *Aen.* 6.784-87) coheres with the Great Harlot's other identity as Rome. A set of interrelated personages/entities feed into the overall depiction of the harlot.

This reading of the Great Harlot (which I call 'character-construct 2') sets the scene for exploring a polemic against 'Jezebel' found covert within the 'visions' (chs. 4-22), not just in the outright polemic of the 'letters' (chs. 2-3). This polemical technique involves one other character, Queen Jezebel, aspects of whom I study in the next chapter.

## Chapter Eight: Queen Jezebel's Polemical Association with Goddesses

A study of the OT queen in this chapter provides a third character construct that features in a polemic against the prophetess involving three woman figures. I give particular attention to the hidden polemic in the text against her, and show that she, as with the Great Harlot, takes on the image goddesses destroyed. This picture I observe of her becomes character-construct 3, which I will shown in the next chapter to be involved in a subversive polemic against the wayward prophetess 'Jezebel'.

The Queen Jezebel in extra-biblical Jewish literature does not depart much from the picture of her in the Hebrew Bible, and she does not take on much of an independent afterlife. In the Rabbinic literature, the queen does not receive much focus on her own as she is often commented in relation to Ahab's deeds and other matters. The main themes in Rabbinic literature revolve mainly around her traits in the Hebrew Bible:

- (1) her instigation of Ahab's evil deeds (*b. Sanh.* 102b; *y. Sanh.* 10.2.28b; *B. Meš'a* 59 (gemara); *Sipre Deut.* 87);
- (2) her persecution of the prophets of the Lord and the righteous (*b. Sanh.* 39b; *Hul.* 4b); and
- (3) her act of idolatry (*b. Sanh.* 102b).

Besides, the texts on Queen Jezebel in Josephus' *Jewish Antiquities* (9.47-50, 105-109, 122-124) are generally faithful to the biblical account and do not particularly seem to distort the picture of Jezebel, though with minor variations in details. It is, thus, expedient to focus on a study of the queen in the Hebrew Bible on which comments in the Jewish traditions are based.

In the Hebrew Bible, Queen Jezebel is largely associated with idolatry and the persecution of the prophets of YHWH (1 Kgs 18:4; 19:2).<sup>1105</sup> She is accused of much prostitution/fornication<sup>1106</sup> and sorcery/witchcraft (2 Kgs 9:22). Her patronage

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<sup>1105</sup> For a study of narrative, sociological and rhetorical reading of Jezebel's depiction, see Patricia Dutcher-Walls, *Jezebel: Portraits of a Queen* (Interfaces Series; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2004).

<sup>1106</sup> Basically, 'זָנָה' in Hebrew can mean both the act of 'fornication' and 'prostitution'. See discussion in Bird, 'Prostitution in the Social World', 40-58.

of the cult of Baal and Asherah<sup>1107</sup> is clear from the feasts she hosts for the prophets of the two deities (1 Kgs 18:19). Furthermore, the Kings narrative depicts her not only as a patroness of the pagan cults, but also imbues her with the faces of goddesses. The gruesome depiction of her death is then not only an invective against the queen, the promoter of pagan cults, but also against pagan deities she represents. We will catch a glimpse of some overt and covert associations of Queen Jezebel with deities, such as Astarte and Asherah. Her image as a ‘woman at the window’ provides the Astarte connection (2 Kgs 9:30), while her role as queen mother and patroness of the cult of Asherah (and Baal) casts her in a position akin to the goddess.

### **1. Jezebel’s Association with Astarte**

The stereotypical decorated head of a ‘woman at the window’ pattern is seen as a representative of the Mesopotamian goddesses, such as Astarte (said to be the oriental Aphrodite Parakypousa / Venus Prospiciens), Ishtar/Inanna and Kilili—goddesses equivalent to Astarte.<sup>1108</sup> We see Jezebel depicted as adorned and

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<sup>1107</sup> The definition of ‘asherah’ (in its various forms: singular plural form, with or without a prenominal suffix or definite article) has been debated. The term is generally agreed to refer to either a goddess or a cultic object, depending on the literary context. See N. Wyatt, ‘Asherah’, in *DDD*, 99-105, see 101-3; John Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan* (JSOTSup 265; London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 42-47.

<sup>1108</sup> R. D. Barnett, *A Catalogue of the Nimrud Ivories: With Other Examples of Ancient Near Eastern Ivories in the British Museum* (2nd ed. revised and enlarged; London: British Museum, 1975), 145-51; Rose Washbourne, ‘Aphrodite Parakypousa “the Woman at the Window”: The Cypriot Astarte-Aphrodite’s Fertility Role in Sacred Prostitution and Rebirth’, in *Reports 1999* (Nicosia: Department of Antiquities, Cyprus), 163-77. ‘Ashtarte of the Window’ is a title attested in *CTA* 33.1; cf. Anthony Bonanno (ed.), *Archaeology and Fertility Cult in the Ancient Mediterranean: Papers Presented at the First International Conference on Archaeology of the Ancient Mediterranean, the University of Malta, 2-5 September 1985* (Amsterdam: Grüner, 1986), 178; E. Lipiński, ‘Vestiges phéniciens d’Andalousie’, *Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica* XV (1984): 81-132, see 114, 178.

The name of the goddess, ‘štrt hr’, translated as ‘Astarte in the window’, is attested in an inscription on a naked enthroned bronze statue found in the area of Seville, and dated to the 8<sup>th</sup> B.C.E. E. Lipiński, ‘Vestiges phéniciens d’Andalousie’, *Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica* XV (1984): 81-132, see 104-16, esp. 114-16.

For a discussion of the myths of different origins, as well as the archaeological evidence surrounding the ‘woman at the window’ across the millenniums, see Noel Robertson, ‘The Ritual Background of the Dying God in Cyprus and Syro-Palestine’, *HTR* 75 (1982): 315-21, esp. 315-18. For archaeological interpretation of Aphrodite Parakypousa with various goddesses and the image of the ‘woman at the window’, see Wolfgang Fauth, *Aphrodite Parakypousa: Untersuchungen zum Erscheinungsbild der vordersaisatischen Dea Prospiciens* (Mainz: Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur, 1967). Astarte as Aphrodite, see also Graf, 64-68, see 64, and N. Wyatt, ‘Astarte’, in *DDD*, 109-114, see 112.

positioned at a window in her death scene (2 Kgs 9:30), which arouses an association with the common image of the 'woman at the window':<sup>1109</sup>

...When Jezebel heard about it [Jehu's coming], she painted her eyes, arranged her hair and looked out of a window.

וַיָּבֹא יְהוּא יִזְרְעֵאלָה וְאִיזָבֵל שָׁמְעָה וַחֲשֵׁם בִּפְנֵי עֵינֶיהָ וַחֲטָב  
אֶת-רֹאשָׁהּ וַתִּשְׁקֶף בַּעַר הַחֲלוֹן:

Combinations of Iron Age Phoenician ivory carvings have been found in Samaria, Khorsabad, Arslan-Tash and Nimrud. They are posited to be of the ninth to the seventh century B.C.E.<sup>1110</sup> The group of fine ivory carvings found in Samaria may mean that ivory was used for luxury purposes by the Israelite monarchy. A burnt fragment can also be dated to the building period of Omri and Ahab. Ahab is known to have constructed a palace inlaid with ivory (1 Kgs 22:39).<sup>1111</sup> This particular 'woman at the window' type of carving was found in all these sites.<sup>1112</sup> It depicts

a woman's smiling face within a recessed window-frame; the window sill is also the rail of a balustrade with four ornate columns, showing that the window belongs to an upper storey. The woman wears long, braided hair and, in examples from Khorsabad and Arslan Tash, a

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The pictorial image of the 'woman at the window' likely alludes to a goddess, especially on expensive carvings of ivory, although ancient prostitutes are also known to peep out of the windows. Robertson, 320-21; Don Seeman, 'The Watcher at the Window: Cultural Poetics of a Biblical Motif', *Prooftexts* 24 (2004): 1-50, see 6. Seeman cautions that before a 'woman-at-the window' literary depiction can be associated to a goddess, there must be other supportive indications in the text to suggest it. I nonetheless suggest that cultic elements of Astarte could explain details in the death scene of Jezebel.

<sup>1109</sup> Cf. Robertson, 318.

<sup>1110</sup> Robertson, 316.

<sup>1111</sup> John Boardman, *The Cambridge Ancient History*, vol. 2 (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; 3 vols; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 471.

<sup>1112</sup> Eleanor Ferris Beach, 'The Samaria Ivories, *Marzeah* and Biblical Texts', *BAR* 56 (1992): 130-39, see 131.

For a well-preserved carving of the 'woman at the window' from 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E. Phoenicia, see Annie Caubet and Danielle Gaborit-Chopin, *Ivoires de l'Orient ancien aux temps modernes* (Paris: Éditions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, 2004), 71. For examples from Northwest Palace at Nimrud in Phoenician style, see Barnett, plates IV, C12, C14-15 (the female faces have distinct eye make-up, hair arranged in braids and wear a necklace). Fragments of the 'woman at the window' can be found in J. W. Crowfoot et al., *The Objects from Samaria* (Samaria-Sebaste: Reports of the Work of the Joint Expedition in 1931-1933 and of the British Expedition in 1935, no III; London: Palestine Exploration Fund, 1938), 29. Also, Irene J. Winter, 'Is there a South Syrian Style of Ivory Carving in the Early First Millennium B.C.?' *Iraq* 43 (1981): 101-130, see 111.

jewelled head-dress; her seductive aspect discloses the goddess Astarte (or a servitor of the goddess, according to some).<sup>1113</sup>

The ‘woman at the window’ is suggested to be the goddess Astarte or her temple servant, or even a ‘prostitute votaress’:

The woman is at ‘the typical Phoenician “upper window”’, in ‘a cult scene of Astarte worship, the woman being a prostitute votaress’. She ‘is’ in some (vital, graphically paradigmatic) sense, Astarte...<sup>1114</sup>

A face at the window on an ivory plaque found in Samaria after the Phoenician pattern wears no jewelry on her forehead as some others do. One may identify her as a temple slave, instead of a goddess.<sup>1115</sup> She looks out from a temple (denoted by the frames around her) and she stands behind a balustrade.<sup>1116</sup> Jezebel’s painted eyes, specially arranged hair-do and her look ‘out of the window’ take on the features of the motif of the ‘woman at the window’ (2 Kgs 9:30). These were prominent features of the ‘woman at the window’ in the ivory plaques. The Tyrian kind of window, different from the Egyptian kind, could allow a person’s head to pass through it. Phoenician styled houses had upper floors with windows.<sup>1117</sup> Like the ‘woman at the window’ standing behind the balustrade, Jezebel could have also similarly be imagined to stand, and from there she might have fallen.<sup>1118</sup>

Josephus (*C. Ap.* 1.18), transcribing Meander the Ephesian, writes that Ethbaal (or Ithobalus) was a priest of Astarte. He was the father of Jezebel (1 Kgs 16:29).<sup>1119</sup> This may concur with the Rabbinic tradition believing that Queen Jezebel was daughter of a pagan priest.<sup>1120</sup> Athalya Brenner explains that it was possible that Jezebel, according to the practices of Mesopotamia, was the high priestess of

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<sup>1113</sup> Robertson, 316.

<sup>1114</sup> Mary Beard and John Henderson, ‘With this Body I Thee Worship: Sacred Prostitution in Antiquity’, *Gender and History* 9 (1997): 480-503, see 490.

<sup>1115</sup> Othmar Keel, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel* (trans. Thomas H. Trapp; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 201.

<sup>1116</sup> Keel, 201.

<sup>1117</sup> Barnett, 145.

<sup>1118</sup> Zainab Bahrani, *Women of Babylon: Gender and Representation in Mesopotamia* (London: Routledge, 2001), 169.

<sup>1119</sup> Othniel Margalith, ‘The kelābim of Ahab’, *VT* 34 (1984): 228-32, see 230; Athalya Brenner, *The Israelite Woman: Social Role and Literary Type in Biblical Narrative* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985), 23.

<sup>1120</sup> *Midr. Samuel* on 1 Sam 1:10; *Yalkut Shimoni* on Joshua 5.

Baal.<sup>1121</sup> As Baal's high priestess, Jezebel would fit the role of Astarte, the consort of Baal.<sup>1122</sup> If so, Jezebel's connection to the cult of Astarte would not have been a far-fetched connection. This is particularly so since Astarte ('Ashtoreth' in the Bible) was the goddess of the Sidon-Phoenicians (1 Kgs 11:5, 33; 2 Kgs 23:13), the native people of Jezebel.<sup>1123</sup> Similar to Jezebel's role as the queen mother and her purported close connection to Astarte, the Ešmunazor inscription (dated later to about 500 B.C.E.) indicates a Sidonian queen mother named Amoaštar as the 'priestess of Astart'.<sup>1124</sup> The worship of the 'astartes' together with the 'baals' was also present among the Israelites (Judg. 2:12; 10:6; 1 Sam 7:4; 12:10).

Judith McKinlay makes a bold suggestion with regard to Jezebel's meeting of Jehu. She conjectures, 'Set the scene within a Phoenician frame and this could be the Astarte watching and waiting for the procession of her godly lover Eshmun....'<sup>1125</sup> Here, McKinlay suggests that Jezebel and Jehu, the anointed king, fit the role of a goddess and a god entering into a marriage. Could the Jezebel in the Kings narrative have taken on the role of a goddess representative and be receiving ceremonially the

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<sup>1121</sup> Brenner (p. 24) reasons,

If the Tyrians did come from Mesopotamia, as is widely believed, they probably imported traditional social institutions into their new land. Thus when they arrived at Tyre they carried with them the custom of appointing a daughter of the reigning king as the highpriestess for the chief local god, Baal Melqart, who was later identified with the god Heracles.

Cf. W. B. Fleming, *The History of Tyre* (New York: AMS Press, 1966), 146-47.

<sup>1122</sup> Brenner (p. 23) writes:

The practice of appointing a chief male priest for a goddess's temple, and a chief priestess for a god's temple, is known already in Mesopotamia of the third millennium BC. This custom is highly suitable for fertility cults, for a basic requirement of such a cult is the assurance of continuous fertility on earth and in society, which is symbolized by a dramatization of divine marriage. The dramatized fertility principle was enacted as an annually recurrent sexual union between a local king and the Great Goddess (whatever her local name might be); a king-substitute and the Goddess; a hierodule of either sex and a commoner; or a priest and priestess, direct representatives of the gods they serve.

The underlying principle of bringing fertility to the land through the rite is now questioned by scholars. But the act of having a priestess of an opposite sex to the god could still be part of the system.

<sup>1123</sup> Brenner, 23.

<sup>1124</sup> Susan Ackerman, 'The Queen Mother and the Cult in Ancient Near East', in Karen L. King (ed.), *Women and Goddess Traditions: In Antiquity and Today* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 179-209, see 189.

<sup>1125</sup> Judith E. McKinlay, *Reframing Her: Biblical Women in Postcolonial Focus* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2004), 306; cf. Brian Peckham, 'Phoenicia and the Religion of Israel: The Epigraphic Evidence', in Patrick D. Miller, Jr, Paul D. Hanson, and S. Dean McBride (eds.), *Ancient Israelite Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 79-99.

anointed king? Actual practice of ἱερός γάμος (sacred marriage) in the ANE is much debated in scholarship.<sup>1126</sup> But mythologically, the king consummates his marriage with a goddess or her priestly representative in a temple.<sup>1127</sup> There are suggestive liturgical texts that lead us to suppose such a mythological tradition in the ANE.<sup>1128</sup> Such a tradition, even if it was not (or was no longer) practiced ritually could have been absorbed into the imagery of the Kings narrative. An occasion for the ritual of 'sacred marriage' between a king and a goddess could be the king's accession, which culminates "in the bestowal of the royal insignia and the goddess' pronouncement of his 'destiny'" as a public support for his reign.<sup>1129</sup> If indeed this had been the context, Jezebel's vehement greeting of Jehu, the murderer of her son and the usurper of her husband's throne, would have been ironical (2 Kgs 9:31). It is suspected that the meeting had included a banquet, as Jehu subsequently went into the palace to eat and drink (cf. 2 Kgs 9:34). Besides Jehu's accession, the occasion

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<sup>1126</sup> There is the question of whether human participants or statues were involved in later sacred marriage rituals. Douglas R. Frayne, 'Notes on the Sacred Marriage Rite' *BO* 42 (1985): 6-22, see 12. For another assessment of the matter, see R. F. G. Sweet, 'A New Look at the "Sacred Marriage" in Ancient Mesopotamia', in Emmet Robbins and Stella Sandahl (eds.), *Corolla Torontonensis: Studies in Honour of Ronald Morton Smith* (Toronto: TSAR, 1994), 85-104. He prefers not to take the sacred marriage mythology as literal rites. For doubts on the existence of an institution of the sacred marriage and the sexual services of the hierodules, see Julia Assante, 'From Whores to Hierodules: The Historiographic Invention of Mesopotamian Female Sex Professional', in A.A. Donohue and Mark D. Fullerton, *Ancient Art and its Historiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 13-47.

<sup>1127</sup> Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 108.

<sup>1128</sup> For a good survey of the various traditions of sacred marriage in ANE, see Hennie J. Marsman, *Women in Ugarit and Israel: Their Social and Religious Position in the Context of the Ancient Near East* (OTS; Leiden: Brill, 2003), see 489-97, esp. 495. Also, Segert, 219. Early literary attestation can be found in a Sumerian text which mentions the days of rites in the New Year festival and 'the divine rules on the day of "sleeping"'. During this day, goddess Inanna (also called 'my queen') has sexual encounter with the king of Sumer (Iddin-Dagan in this case) coupled with sacrifices and a big banquet in honour of the goddess. See text in Samuel Noah Kramer, *The Sacred Marriage Rite: Aspects of Faith, Myth, and Ritual in Ancient Sumer* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969), 65-66, 79. In a text elsewhere, the king approaches 'my queen' Inanna, for intercourse and embraces the 'hierodule' [of An]... Kramer, 84. For a study of the Sumerian sacred marriage, see Kramer, 49-133.

For a suggestive text, *KTU* 23 (= *CTA* 23), 'Poem on the Gracious Gods', see E. Lipiński, 'Fertility Cult in Ancient Ugarit', in Bonanno (ed.), 207-224; also N. Wyatt, *Religious Texts from Ugarit* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 324-35. The text narrates the sacred marriage between El and his two wives, Athirat and Rahmay. Also, Stanislav Segert, 'An Ugaritic Text Related to the Fertility Cult (*KTU* 1.23)', in Bonanno (ed.), 217-24, 219; cf. Thorkild Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness: A History of Mesopotamian Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 32-47. On Akkadian sources, see J. Bottero, "La Hierogamie apres l'epoque sumerienne", in Samuel Noah Kramer, *Le mariage sacri a Babylone* (Paris, 1983), 175-214.

<sup>1129</sup> Amélie Kuhrt, *Ancient Near East: c. 3000-330 BC*, vol.1 (2 vols. London: Routledge, 1995), 70.



could have been a funeral feast for Joram, son of Ahab and Jezebel.<sup>1130</sup> This accounts for the vehement greeting made by Jezebel in reference to Jehu as the murderer of his master (2 Kgs 9:31). Paradoxically, Jehu (and other guests) had attended the feast at the palace without the hostess/queen mother, who had become a meal for dogs outside (2 Kgs 9:34). The biblical narrative is terse here with regard to its allusions. We cannot know certainly what undercurrents are played beneath its surface. However, the strange details about Jezebel at the window, having painted her eyes, the eunuchs with her, and the flesh-devouring dogs, and the grisly yet specific remains of her body do leave the reader wondering at the meaning of it all.

Some courtly or pagan cultic setting of Jezebel at the window may have been suggested by the presence of eunuchs with her (2 Kgs 9:32). Eunuchs were sometimes guardians of royal harem,<sup>1131</sup> and in this case, they could be Jezebel's personal assistants. Eunuch priests were also known to have served the Syrian goddess Atargatis, who was a later conflation of Astarte and Anat.<sup>1132</sup> Astarte was also the consort of the priest-king in Cyprus.<sup>1133</sup> In addition, dogs were associated with the funerary rites of the cults of Phoenician goddesses Astarte and Anat, and also with the cults of Sarama, Artemis and Diana.<sup>1134</sup> They were also associated with feasts, such as funerary or matrimonial.<sup>1135</sup> Interestingly, there may be a word play on the 'dogs' (כְּלָבִים) devouring her flesh. The term could refer to canines or temple servants, particularly the male hierodules of Astarte.<sup>1136</sup> 'כְּלָבִים' can designate 'cult

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<sup>1130</sup> The time ensuing between Jehu's murder of Joram and his meeting with Jezebel is left ambiguous in the narrative (2 Kgs 9). The narrative is disrupted by an intervening description of Ahaziah's burial and a summative statement about his reign (vv. 28-29). This could indicate a gap in time between the events, and the possibility of a funeral feast held in relation to Joram's death or a feast in relation to Jehu's accession.

<sup>1131</sup> Beverly W. Cushman, 'The Politics of the Royal Harem and the Case of Bat-Sheba', *JSOT* 30 (2006): 327-343, see 336.

<sup>1132</sup> Benko, *The Virgin Goddess*, 57.

<sup>1133</sup> Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion: Archaic and Classical* (trans. John Raffan; Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), 108.

<sup>1134</sup> Deborah A. Appler, 'From Queen to Cuisine: Food Imagery in the Jezebel Narrative', *Semeia* 86 (1999): 55-71, see 65.

<sup>1135</sup> Marvin H. Pope, *Song of Songs: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Double Day, 1977), 211-15.

<sup>1136</sup> Margalith, 229. There is a tendency for scholars to interpret 'keleb' in Deut 23:18-19 as male cultic prostitutes, but for various views, John Barclay Burns, 'Devotee or Deviate: The "dog" (keleb) in Ancient Israel as a Symbol of Male Passivity and Perversion', *Journal of Religion and Society* 2 (2000): 1-10, see 2-5. Burns proposes that it denotes male homosexual prostitutes.

personnel receiving payments in the temple of Astarte at Kition' (KAI 37 B10).<sup>1137</sup> In Deut 23:19 of the Hebrew Bible (v. 18 of the English), the 'hire' or 'wage' (אֶחָנָן) of the 'female prostitute' (זוֹנָה) and the corresponding 'silver' (מַחִיר) of a 'dog' (כָּלֵב) would only make sense in the context of prostitution. Being paired with a 'female prostitute', the 'כָּלֵב' most likely designates a male prostitute, especially in relation to homosexual activity.<sup>1138</sup> Though it would be too much to speculate on the sexual roles of the eunuchs in attendance of Jezebel in 2 Kgs 9:32, transvestites of transgender tendency are known to have served Aphrodite-Astarte.<sup>1139</sup> The strange elements surrounding Jezebel's death could, pejoratively speaking, take on a sexual connotation. If homosexual temple prostitutes are indeed meant in the 'כָּלָבִים' consuming her flesh (2 Kgs 9:32-33, 36), then a cannibalistic imagery is elicited. Ironically, the eunuchs serving Jezebel at the window (there alluding to Astarte) not only murder her, they further mutilate and consume her body.

This might not be all to the word play. There could also be a further pun on the 'hands' (יָדַיִם) and 'feet' (רַגְלַיִם) -- part of the leftovers of Jezebel's body (2 Kgs 9:35). The male sexual organ is known to be represented by the word 'yad' (hand). As way of euphemism, Isa 57:8 speaks of a prostitute widening the bed for lovers and beholding the 'hand' and *1Qumran Scroll* 7.13 speaks of the indecency of exposing the 'hand'. These uses of 'yad' refer to the male sexual member. There could be a word play on 'יָדַיִם' in Song 5: 4-5 for the female organ.<sup>1140</sup> 'Yad' is attested to denote the sexual member in Hebrew, Ugaritic and Arabic.<sup>1141</sup> 'רַגְלַיִם' is also another term that can be used to refer to the genitalia.<sup>1142</sup> An alternative reading of Masoretic text for Isa 36:12 reads 'water of their feet' (מֵי רַגְלֵיהֶם) for urine.<sup>1143</sup>

<sup>1137</sup> John Day, 'Does the Old Testament refer to Sacred Prostitution and Did it Actually Exist in Ancient Israel', in Kevin J. Cathcart, Carmel McCarthy, John F. Healey (eds.), *Biblical and Near Eastern Essay: Studies in Honour of Kevin J. Cathcart* (JSOTSup 375; London: T&T Clark, 2004), 2-21, see 4-5. Day notes that sacred prostitution in the cult of Cypriot Astarte or Aphrodite would cohere with reference to cultic prostitution in classical sources (p. 5, n. 4).

<sup>1138</sup> Hans M. Barstad, *The Religious Polemics of Amos: Studies in the Preaching of Am 2, 7B-8; 4,1-13; 5,1-27; 6,4-7; 8,14* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1984), 29.

<sup>1139</sup> Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 97.

<sup>1140</sup> P. R. Ackroyd, 'Yad' and related terms, *TDOT* 5:393-426, see 403. For other terms with sexual connotations, see pp. 402-3; Mathias Delcor, *Religion D'Israël et Proche Orient Ancien: Des Phéniciens aux Esséniens* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1976), 146.

<sup>1141</sup> Delcor, 147-48.

<sup>1142</sup> Alice Bach, *Women in the Hebrew Bible: A Reader* (London: Routledge, 1999), 82.

<sup>1143</sup> For details, Delcor, 143-49.

Ultimately, it is the literary context that ascertains the suggested use. The sexual connotation in Jezebel's body remains seems to be played out as a shameful condemnation for her gross 'harlotries' (זְנוּנִים) that Jehu condemns (2 Kgs 9:22).

Prostitution was alleged to be associated with the cult of Astarte-Ishtar, as there were believed to be male and female sacred prostitutes in the sanctuaries.<sup>1144</sup> Inanna/Ishtar associated with Astarte (who was further assimilated with Aphrodite) 'was often herself called a prostitute, and she was the patron of prostitutes, so the presence of prostitutes in her temples is to be expected'.<sup>1145</sup> In terms of vilification of a goddess representative associated with great harlotries, perhaps in relation to the cult of Astarte, the sexual connotations to the remains of Jezebel's 'hands' (יָדַיִם) and 'feet' (רַגְלַיִם) could have made sense.

Moore explains, in a more ordinary way, the grotesque remains of hands and feet in relation to the false letters the hand of Jezebel has written and her setting foot on the properties stolen from Israelites.<sup>1146</sup> He also notices a correspondence of Jezebel to the goddess Anat in Ugaritic mythology.<sup>1147</sup> Both of them paint their eyes and mock their opponent(s). While Anat hangs the palms of her murdered enemies around her waist, Jezebel is reduced to her hands, feet and skull.<sup>1148</sup>

The grotesque depiction of Jezebel's death, involving cannibalistic temple servants and sexual members as remains is suggestive in castigating a queen, priestess and goddess representative who leads Israel to idolatry and who is accused of fornication/harlotry. If one prefers a more literalistic reading of the narrative, one could then refuse the suggested connotations of flesh-devouring temple servants and sexual body parts; instead of allusions to a Near Eastern goddess, one could see Jezebel painting her face and arranging her hair at the window scene as simply that of a woman's last resort to her sexual prowess to subdue her enemy, or perhaps

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<sup>1144</sup> Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 108. Also, Day, '...Sacred Prostitution?', 2-21.

<sup>1145</sup> Day, '...Sacred Prostitution?' 16.

<sup>1146</sup> Michael S. Moore, 'Jehu's Coronation and Purge of Israel', *VT* 53 (2003): 97-114, see 108-9.

<sup>1147</sup> Anat purges her enemies, while Jehu exterminates Ahab's house (*KTU* 1.3 i-iii; 2 Kgs 9:14-10:36).

<sup>1148</sup> Moore, 106-9.

simply to meet her fate bravely.<sup>1149</sup> But yet, certain descriptive details in the account continue to nag at the reader for a deeper meaning.

## 2. Jezebel's Association with Asherah

Jezebel's explicit association with goddess Asherah is in her patronage of 400 prophets of the goddess and 450 prophets of Baal at her table (1 Kgs 18:19).<sup>1150</sup> But such a banquet that hosts close to a thousand people, presumably at a regular basis,<sup>1151</sup> reveals a lavish act of patronage on the part of Jezebel, and speaks of her close connections with the cult of Asherah, another Mesopotamian goddess. Being the most powerful woman in the royal court, Jezebel could have been seen as the human representative of Asherah, acting on behalf of the goddess to host the feasts.<sup>1152</sup> Furthermore, Jezebel's position as the great lady and queen mother makes her a likely human representative of Asherah.

Jezebel is referred to as a 'גְּבִירָה' or 'great lady',<sup>1153</sup> within the circles of the king's family by a Judahite delegation (2 Kgs 10:13). Literally, 'גְּבִירָה' is a term applied to the queen mother when used within the king's court.<sup>1154</sup> Jezebel was like

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<sup>1149</sup> Peter R. Ackroyd, 'Goddesses, Women and Jezebel', in Averil Cameron and Amélie Kuhrt (eds.), *Images of Women in Antiquity* (London: Croom Helm, 1983), 245-59, see 246; Eleanor Ferris Beach, 'Transforming Goddess Iconography in Hebrew Narrative', in Karen L. King (ed.), *Women and Goddess Traditions in Antiquity and Today* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 239-63, see 242-43; Nehama Aschkenasy, *Woman at the Window: Biblical Tales of Oppression and Escape* (Detroit, Mich.: Wayne State University Press, 1998), 15-16

<sup>1150</sup> Asherah may be depicted as the consort of Baal here. In Ugaritic texts, Asherah is the consort of El (as *Elat*), but she is also called *Ba'alat* (consort of Baal). Though Anat is the chief consort Baal, Astarte and Asherah are occasionally depicted with him. William G. Dever, 'Asherah, Consort of Yahweh? New Evidence from Kuntilet 'Ajrûd', *BASOR* 255 (1984): 21-37, see 29.

<sup>1151</sup> The prophets were identified as those 'eating at Jezebel's table' (אֹכְלֵי שֻׁלְחַן אִיזָבֵל). This appears to denote the banqueting as a regular affair.

<sup>1152</sup> Jezebel being female would suggest further her being the representative of Asherah rather than of Baal.

<sup>1153</sup> Roger Tames, '1 and 2 Kings', in James D. G. Dunn, and John William Rogerson (eds.), *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003), 246-81, see 260. The term 'גְּבִירָה' can also be used to refer to the lady/mistress as opposed to a servant (Gen 16:4; Ps. 123:2; Prov 30:23). Cf. Niels-Erik A. Andreasen, 'The Role of the Queen Mother in Israelite Society', *CBQ* 45 (1983): 179-194, see 179.

<sup>1154</sup> Ackerrman, 'The Queen Mother', 392. Jezebel was the mother of Joram (2 Kgs 9:22), the ruling king, and the consort of the former king. In this sense, she was the 'queen mother', even though the text does not indicate whether she wielded as much power over the court during the time of her son Joram as she did during the reign of Ahab as some kind of 'co-regent' and issuing decrees in his name (1 Kgs 21:8). Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews: From Joshua to Esther*, vol. 4 (7 vols.; trans. Henrietta Szold and Paul Radin; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 189.

Maacah, an earlier queen also called a 'גְּבִירָה' (1 Kgs 15:13; 2 Chr 15:16), involved in the cult of Asherah. Maacah was deposed in Asa's reformation from her role as the גְּבִירָה for constructing an idolatrous cultic object for Asherah. The need for Asa to remove Maacah his grandmother from her position as גְּבִירָה (1Kgs 15: 13) shows that she held a position of enormous influence in the court.<sup>1155</sup> Besides Jezebel, we have another example of a queen mother in the OT having leadership role in the cult of Asherah and leading the nation to idolatry.

Ackerman proposes a close connection between the cult of Asherah and the position of the גְּבִירָה. She sees the cultic role of the גְּבִירָה predominantly in the worship of Asherah.<sup>1156</sup> There is scant information on the role of the גְּבִירָה in biblical accounts and it is difficult to know the specifics of the cultic role.<sup>1157</sup> One can, however, be persuaded that there are similarities between goddess Asherah and the queen mother in their roles affecting royal succession. It might be that by promoting the worship of Asherah, a queen mother is asserting her position as a human representative of the goddess, which in turns strengthens her position in the royal court.<sup>1158</sup> In Ugaritic mythology, king Keret, who is deprived of progeny, sets out under the instructions of El to procure Ḫurriya as his wife. He prays and makes a vow to 'Athirat (Asherah)<sup>1159</sup> of Tyre and goddess of Sidon' for help in the matter even though he has the endorsement of El (*KTU* 1.14 iv:35-49). Ackerman explains

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<sup>1155</sup> For a study of the possible power of influence held by a queen mother, see Zafira ben-Barak, 'The Status and right of the Gēbīrā', *JBL* 110/1 (1991): 23-34; Elna K Solvang, *A Woman's Place is in the House: Royal Women of Judah and their Involvement in the House of David* (JSOTSup 349; Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), 73-78; also Cushman, 327-43. For discussion of three royal women, Bathsheba, Jezebel and Athaliah, see Carol Smith, "'Queenship" in Israel? The Cases of Bathsheba, Jezebel and Athaliah', in John Day (ed.), *King and Messiah in Israel and the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar* (JSOTSup 270; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 142-62. A seal dated ninth or eighth century B.C. has been found inscribed with *Jzbl*. One cannot be sure that it belonged to Queen Jezebel. But it could have belonged to an important woman. Seals of prominent women were found in Mesopotamia and Egypt. Brenner, 27; N. Avigad, 'The Seal of Jezebel', in *IEJ* 14 (1964): 274-76.

<sup>1156</sup> Ackerman, 'The Queen Mother', 388.

<sup>1157</sup> For discussion on role of queen mothers, see Brenner, 17-20; Ackerman, 'The Queen Mother', 385-401; Andreasen, 179-194; Ben-Barak, 23-34.

<sup>1158</sup> Ackerman similarly suggests that the queen mother is the human representative of Asherah in the court that adopts the cult of the goddess. Ackerman, 'The Queen Mother', 181-82, 187.

<sup>1159</sup> *Atrt* is vocalized as 'Athirat(u)' in Ugaritic or 'Asherah' according to Hebrew conventions. Wyatt, 'Asherah', 99. For arguments for the equivalence of Athirat and Asherah, see Day, *Yahweh and the Gods*, 47-48; B. A. Mastin, 'Yahweh's Asherah, Inclusive Monotheism and the Question of Dating', in John Day (ed.), *In Search of Pre-Exilic Israel: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar* (London: T&T Clark International, 2004), 326-51, see 329.

that Kirta's vows to Asherah because his mission involves the search for his bride or queen-mother-to-be, who will eventually bear him an heir to succeed his throne. We know that Asherah is also called the 'mother of the gods', having the title *qnyt ilm*, 'creatix of the gods'/'mother of the gods' (*KTU* 1.4 iv:31-32).<sup>1160</sup> (We are reminded of her corresponding role to Cybele, the Mother of the Gods in the Graeco-Roman setting.<sup>1161</sup>) Asherah is said to have seventy sons (e.g., *KTU* 1.4 iv:46). Here the role of Asherah as the 'mother of the gods' is similar to the role of the 'queen mother' as the mother of kings. Asherah's help is sought in the matter of royal succession.<sup>1162</sup> Kirta's mission having been completed, the heir born to him is said to 'suckle the milk of Athirat[or Asherah]' and 'suck at the breasts of Virgin Anat'. Athirat (or Asherah) and Anat are called the 'two wet-nurses of the gods' (*KTU* 1.15 ii:26-29).<sup>1163</sup> In *KTU* 1.6 i:44-47 after Baal's death, El (the highest god of the Ugaritic Pantheon) asks 'the Great-Lady-who-tramples-Yam' (Athirat/Asherah) to provide a son for the throne. The goddess suggests a son for the throne, though he is not found to be a suitable match to the calibre of Baal.<sup>1164</sup>

In the Bible, the role of the queen mother influencing royal succession can be seen most clearly in the example of Bathsheba who appealed to King David to have her son Solomon succeed the throne (1 Kgs 1:11-31). The practice of the queen mother playing a decisive role in the choice of the heir to the throne is found in other places in the ANE.<sup>1165</sup> As such, one sees a comparative role between queen mothers and Asherah. Furthermore, among her various names, Asherah shares the title of the 'great lady' ('*rabitū*' in Ugaritic;<sup>1166</sup> נְבִיָּה in Hebrew) with queen mothers.<sup>1167</sup>

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<sup>1160</sup> S. A. Wiggins, 'The Myth of Asherah: Lion Lady and Serpent Goddess', *UF* 23 (1991): 383-94, see 392.

<sup>1161</sup> Cf. Cybele in ch. 7, §2.1.

<sup>1162</sup> Along a similar line, the Cybele the 'Mother of the Gods' (or the Greek Rhea) plays the role of the mother of Caesars (see ch. 7, §2.1.1), and mothers of significant tyrants of Asia (see ch. 7, §2.1.3). Binger notices parallels between the Greek pantheon and Ugaritic mythology. Tilde Binger, *Asherah: Goddesses in Ugarit, Israel and the Old Testament* (JSOTSup 232; Copenhagen International Seminar 2; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 78.

<sup>1163</sup> Ackerman, 'The Queen Mother', 186. Here the 'gods', presumably refer to 'kings'.

<sup>1164</sup> Wyatt, *Religious Texts from Ugarit*, 131; Cyrus H. Gordon, 'Ugaritic *RBT/RABĪTU*', in Lyle Esinger and Glen Taylor (eds.), *Ascribe to the Lord: Biblical and Other Studies in Memory of Peter C. Craigie* (JSOTSup 67; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1988), 127-32, see 129.

<sup>1165</sup> Ackerman, 'The Queen Mother', 385-86. Ben-Barak, 32-33.

<sup>1166</sup> Asherah in the Ugarit texts is known as '*rbt. aṣrt ym*', interpreted as 'Lady, Asherah of Sea/Day' (e.g., *CTA* 4.III.27-28; 6.I.44-47, 53); cf. Binger, 72, 80. It is not clear what her relation to *ym* as 'sea' or 'day' is, but *ym* could refer to the personal name for one of her seventy sons; Binger, 53. This is

Given the similarities between the function and title of the queen mother in the royal court and that of goddess Asherah, a cult of the queen mother might have been developed using Asherah as the patron goddess.

The culture of the Hebrew Bible is set within a more general ANE tradition. A comparison with Ugaritic mythological tradition, though earlier in time than the biblical narrative, would not be entirely inappropriate. It is worth noting that a few allusions, though not fully symmetrical, are noticed between characters in Ugaritic mythology and the depiction of Ahab, Jehu and Jezebel in the Kings narrative:<sup>1168</sup>

- (1) Asherah is said to have seventy sons (*KTU* 1.4 vi:46), whereas Ahab has seventy sons. Although we do not know if all of them were born of Jezebel (2 Kgs 10:1), this could constitute an allusive reference to Asherah.
- (2) Baal massacres the sons of Asherah (*KTU* 1.6 v:1-4) and assumes the throne (*KTU* 1.6 v:5); Jehu plotted and killed all the sons of Ahab (2 Kgs 10:1-9), and he became king of Israel (his anointing had taken place before that; 2 Kgs 9:6).<sup>1169</sup> It is ironic under comparison of the two stories that Jehu was the exterminator of Baal-worship in the OT, but depicted in connection with the action of Baal in the Ugaritic myth.
- (3) The scene of Asherah meeting Baal<sup>1170</sup> reminds one of Jezebel meeting Jehu. Both great ladies and queen mothers were braced to

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consistent with her role as the (queen) 'mother of the gods', since among her sons are Yam, Mot and even El.

<sup>1167</sup> Wiggins interprets *rabitū* as mother of the king or dowager queen involved in naming the heir to the throne. Binger, 81, 83; cf. S. A. Wiggins, *A Reassessment of 'Asherah': A Study According to the Textual Sources of the First Two Millennia BCE* (AOAT 235; Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker, 1993), 63, 81.

<sup>1168</sup> A similar intertextual reading between *KTU* 1.3 i-iii and 2 Kgs 9:14-10:36 yields parallels between Jezebel and Jehu's descriptions and Anat's purge of her enemies (Gapnu and Ugar). A parody in the biblical narrative on Ugaritic mythology is observed. We see Jezebel is depicted, in part, in the role of the Anat in the Ugaritic account, who similarly adorns herself, paints her eyes and mocks her enemies. Moore, 106-114.

<sup>1169</sup> The Bible does not describe when he assumed the throne, but it seems that after he had killed Joram (2 Kgs 9:24), he was already effectively the king.

<sup>1170</sup> *KTU* 1.4 ii:12-26,

In lifting up her eyes she beheld:  
the coming of Baal Athirat saw indeed,

meet the exterminator of their sons, the new successor to the throne. Asherah's antagonistic greeting (*KTU* 1.4 ii:12-26) reminds of Jezebel's antagonistic words to Jehu (2 Kgs 10:11). Asherah's instinct tells her that Baal (with Anat) is coming to strike down her sons and her kinsfolk (carried out in another episode). Jezebel knew that Jehu was coming to overthrow her. The whole house of Ahab was exterminated.

Although the two accounts are not analogous in every detail, each with their own twists, some intriguing similarities in the narratives of Jezebel and Asherah emerge under comparison. Would the biblical narrative have associated Jezebel with Asherah, the goddess? Jezebel at the surface level of the biblical narrative is depicted in close relationship with Asherah: a patroness of her cult hosting her prophets. She holds the position of 'גַּבִּירָה' and queen mother, analogous in role with her. We saw that besides Asherah, Jezebel is also depicted subtly as the goddess Astarte or her representative. In all this, a polemical technique against the idolatrous queen could have been employed: to depict her as a goddess/goddess representative and putting her to a gruesome death. The technique strikes two evils with one stone. As Janet Gaines writes aptly of Jezebel's portrayal in the OT, 'When the queen dies, the goddess she represents is supposed to die along with her in a dramatic final gasp'.<sup>1171</sup>

### 3. Conclusion

I have thus performed a reading of Queen Jezebel taking into account the subtleties in a narrative. This is our character-construct 3. From the above analysis, I argue that Queen Jezebel in the Kings narrative is associated literarily with, at least, two of the

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...  
 At this her feet [trembled];  
 Her tendons [snapped about] her  
 [Above, her f]ace sweated  
 ....  
 She lifted up her voice and cried  
 'Why has Valiant Baal come?'  
 'Why has V[ir]gin Anat come?'  
 Are my enemies about to [sm]ite my sons?  
 Are they [about to destroy the co]mpany of my kinsfolk?

<sup>1171</sup> Janet Howe Gaines, *Music in the Old Bones: Jezebel Through the Ages* (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999), 70.



three great goddesses of ancient Mesopotamia, Asherah and Astarte.<sup>1172</sup> An ongoing conflation of goddess identities<sup>1173</sup> makes Jezebel's connections to more than one goddess unsurprising. Her goddess association provides a fuller understanding of her high-profile involvement in pagan cults of the two goddesses. This explains a relentless accusation in Jewish literature ascribing her of leading Israel into idolatry. On the surface of the narrative, we see her hosting the prophets of Baal and Asherah at her table, and zealously persecuting the competing prophets of YHWH. Her 'many harlotries and sorceries' (2 Kgs 9:22) may have been another aspect of her cultic practice. The overtones in the narrative associating her with goddess Astarte or her cultic representative can help explain the strange details in her death scene, and sharpen the anti-idolatry thrust of the passage. An anti-idolatry backdrop to the Jezebel narrative is seen in the Baal-YHWH conflict on mount Carmel in which Elijah challenges the 450 prophets of Baal 'who eat at Jezebel's table' (1 Kgs 18:16-40, see v. 19).

Whether Jezebel's 'woman at the window' allusion could have been picked up by individual readers in the first century is a difficult question. But we may posit that such an image was likely known in general to the inhabitants of Asia Minor. The image of Aphrodite Parakypusa (or Venus Prospiciens) as the goddess looking down from a window or door of a building was known in imperial times, and was circulated in writings of Ovid and Plutarch at least up to the second century C.E.<sup>1174</sup> In terms of artifacts, the city of Salamis of Cyprus had a statue of Venus Prospiciens existing in the time of Ovid around the turn of the Common Era.<sup>1175</sup> Furthermore, the 'woman at the window' motif had a long tradition in Asia Minor. A Cypriot bronze stand of twelfth century B.C.E. depicts such a motif, centuries before the Phoenician colonization of Cyprus.<sup>1176</sup> A gold plaque from Palaipaphos of Cyprus of the Cypro-

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<sup>1172</sup> The other great goddess is Anat.

<sup>1173</sup> Johanna H. Stuckey, 'The Great Goddesses of the Levant', *JSSEA* 30 (2003): 127-57, see 149. See also Ackerman, 'The Queen Mother', 189; Judith M. Hardley, *The Cult of Asherah in Ancient Israel and Judah: Evidence for a Hebrew Goddess* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 38. The association of Asherah and Astarte is also noted by Joan E. Taylor, 'The Asherah, the Menorah and the Sacred Tree', *JSOT* 66 (1995): 29-54, see 47.

<sup>1174</sup> See Fauth, 10-11. For the myth accounting for the statue of Aphrodite Parakypousa in Cyprus, see Plut. *Amat.* 20.766C-D and Ov. *Metam.* 14.760-1; for another legend related to the goddess, see Ov. *Metam.* 10.221, 238-42.

<sup>1175</sup> Ov. *Metam.* 14.759-61.

<sup>1176</sup> Washbourne, 163.

Geometric III period (850-750 B.C.E.) depicts ‘a rectangular double-framed window containing an image of Aštarte who seems to look down upon the chariot scene in the lower register’.<sup>1177</sup> A goddess with uplifted hands in a multiple architrave occurs on stone larnakes of Cyprus dated to the seventh century B.C.E.<sup>1178</sup> A terracotta model of the Cypro-Archaic II period (600-475 B.C.E.) has the goddess ‘seated within her shrine whose doorway consists of an outer frame with a second, recessed, inner frame’. An inverted crescent, a symbol of Aphrodite, over a disc is mounted on each of the frames.<sup>1179</sup> The motif of the goddess in a window or door depicted as multiple frames is thus seen to be a long-established motif in Cyprus in the fringes of Asia Minor, just as it is well-known in Mesopotamia.

The above reading of Queen Jezebel’s goddess association in the OT narrative gives depth to our understanding of the anti-idolatry polemic against the queen. In Revelation, this queen is brought into connection with a false prophetess and the Great Harlot in a derogatory web of associations. I will demonstrate this web of inter-connections and a covert polemic against the prophetess in the following chapter.

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<sup>1177</sup> Washbourne, 168.

<sup>1178</sup> Washbourne, 172.

<sup>1179</sup> Washbourne, 174.

## **Chapter Nine: Polemic against Prophetess Jezebel through Derogatory Associations with Queen Jezebel and the Great Harlot**

Finally, in this last chapter of Part Three, I highlight a subtle polemic that I see in the text against the wayward prophetess 'Jezebel'. This polemic is observed through a specific web of derogatory associations consisting of three characters. We see 'Jezebel' criticized openly in Rev 2:20-24. I suggest, as with Duff, that the polemic against her does not end in the 'letters' (Rev 2-3) but extend into the 'visions' (Rev 4-22) in a subtle way. Drawing upon three very specific character-constructs of the wayward prophetess, the Great Harlot and OT Jezebel that I have performed in chapters six to eight, I show that the self-claimed prophetess, 'Jezebel', is castigated through a web of derogatory associations with these two other women in a web of derogatory associations.

### ***1. The Great Harlot, Queen Jezebel and Polemic***

Based on two preceding chapters, both the Great Harlot and Queen Jezebel are seen to take on images of queens and goddesses. These images are seen to be prominent in their depiction. Both the Great Harlot and the OT queen are depicted as accursed and destroyed. An anti-idolatry polemic is seen to unfold at their destruction.

Figuratively, the goddesses represented by them are also seen as fallen. But even without an idea of the goddess-overtones in the depiction of Queen Jezebel in the Kings narrative (2 Kgs 9:30-37), nor any idea of goddess-representation in the Great Harlot (Rev 17-18), one would still notice from a cursory reading that both Queen Jezebel and the Great Harlot are cast in polemical terms. Their depictions are of a ridiculing nature and appear to castigate others put in their shoes. Their death are described in grisly and derogatory terms. The former is dismembered and the latter is left naked; and both are consumed by beasts. Both are depicted as fated to die horribly (2 Kgs 9:6-11; Rev 17:16-17). The account of Queen Jezebel's death has in its background an anti-idolatry YHWH-Baal contest (1 Kgs 18-19); while the Great Harlot of Revelation connotes in one respect a prophetic opponent, who leads church members into idolatrous contexts involving pagan cults (see ch. 6, §6.1). A stance against idolatrous behaviour is also reflected in the 'visions' (chs. 4-22) of Revelation as well (14:9-12; 22:8-9; 22:15).

Applying the Great Harlot with a polemical slant against certain persons or entities is not a new interpretation. Scholars have interpreted her as the goddess Roma and as Rome. Both the woman and city-image of the Great Harlot have long been read in terms of anti-imperial polemics.<sup>1180</sup> The corrupted harlot in Rev 17-18 is an antithesis to the virgin bride (Rev 21-22). Moreover, calling another a 'prostitute' was a conventional way of accusing the 'other' of idolatry in the Jewish Christian in prophetic tradition.<sup>1181</sup> 'Playing the harlot' can be used metaphorically in the OT to refer to apostasy or idolatry.<sup>1182</sup> Idolatry is described as whoring/prostituting (הִזְנָה) after foreign gods (Exod 34:15-16; Lev 17:7; 20:5; Deut 31:16). God's apostate people is described as a prostitute (e.g. Jer 2:20; 3:1, 3; Ezek 16:15-42; ch. 23). Similarly, the Great Harlot of Rev 17-18 can be used, in this respect, as a polemic against an idolatrous person or behaviour (more below). Feminist scholars critique the sexist or misogynist stance of such a derogatory depiction of a woman.<sup>1183</sup> Ideological readers are concerned with the power of domination and colonialization

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<sup>1180</sup> The anti-imperial polemic using the great harlot has received sufficient attention in past studies, and it is not the focus of this thesis. See Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 150. He sees Revelation as a 'narrative of resistance to Roman hegemony', that is, anti-Roman imperialism (pp. 213-14). Schüssler Fiorenza sees a rhetoric against Roman hegemony in the destruction of the great harlot/Babylon that is conveyed in gender terms. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, 'Babylon the Great: A Rhetorical-Political Reading of Revelation 17-18' in David L. Barr (ed.), *The Reality of Apocalypse: Rhetoric and Politics in the Book of Revelation* (SBLSymS 39; Atlanta: SBL, 2006), 243-69. See also David L. Barr, 'Doing Violence: Moral Issues in Reading John's Apocalypse', in Barr (ed.), *Reading the Book of Revelation*, 97-108; Peter S. Perry, 'Critiquing the Excess of the Empire: A *Synkrisis* of John of Patmos and Dio of Prusa', *JSNT* 29 (2007): 473-96.

In his book, Royalty reads Revelation as an invective against the 'bad wealth' of the Roman economy, and addresses the issues within churches from this perspective. Royalty, 202-210. The polemic against the imperial cult and Rome's economic power is given attention in Kraybill, *Imperial Cult*, 17, 147-65; and Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 338-83 ('The Economic Critique of Rome in Revelation 18').

<sup>1181</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, 14.

<sup>1182</sup> Phyllis Bird, "'To Play the Harlot': An Inquiry into an Old Testament Metaphor", in Peggy L. Day (ed.), *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 75-94, see 75. Bird further suggests a polemical use of the term.

<sup>1183</sup> Tina Pippin, *Death and Desire: The Rhetoric of Gender in the Apocalypse of John* (Literary Currents in Biblical Interpretation; Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992); Tina Pippin, 'The Heroine and the Whore: Fantasy and the Female in the Apocalypse of John', *Semeia* 60 (1992): 67-82. See a short survey of feminist responses in Wes Howard-Brook and Antony Gwyther, *Unveiling Empire: Reading Revelation Then and Now* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2002), 161-62. Schüssler Fiorenza reads the rhetoric of Revelation with the broader lens of the 'Western classical patriarchal system and its interlocking structures of racism, classism, colonialism, and sexism'. Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, 14. For a survey and critique of certain feminist readings, see Schüssler Fiorenza, 'Babylon the Great', 259-67.

in her depiction.<sup>1184</sup> Any such power is destroyed in the destruction of the harlot, and reveals a polemical edge to her depiction.

In particular, Duff's *Who Rides the Beast?* reads the Great Harlot as vilifying a major prophetic opponent named Jezebel. His literary study presents a strong case that the characters in the visions (such as the celestial woman, Great Harlot Babylon, Bride Jerusalem and prophetess 'Jezebel') are used to form a system of oppositions and equivalences designed to relegate Jezebel to the camp of the bad characters.<sup>1185</sup> He also performs a rhetorical study of gender stereotyping involved in the vilification of Jezebel. He sees Jezebel as an 'out of control' character overstepping the legitimate boundary of behaviour in terms of food and sex.<sup>1186</sup> Further positive and negative correlations are made of Jezebel with the 'beast from the earth'/'false prophet' (13:11-17; 19:20), as well as with the Elijah figure in the two witnesses (11:3-6).<sup>1187</sup> She is in the process depicted as an 'eschatological antiprophet'.<sup>1188</sup> The purpose of the system of associations is to exclude Jezebel from the true community of God and to cast her in the shoes of God's enemies. Duff's careful argumentation shows convincingly that there is an anti-Jezebelian rhetoric in the 'visions' (not just the 'letters') of Revelation, involving the Great Harlot and other characters in the 'visions'.

Duff's reading of the polemic centres on the prophetess Jezebel as I will also do in this chapter.<sup>1189</sup> Here, I suggest an added dimension to the polemic delivery against the prophetess that is not covered by Duff. This involves a web of associations binding the false prophetess to an OT Queen of the same name and to a great harlot.

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<sup>1184</sup> Jean K. Kim, "'Uncovering Her Wickedness'" An Inter(Con)Textual Reading of Revelation 17 From a Postcolonial Feminist Perspective', *JSNT* 25 (2002): 185-211.

<sup>1185</sup> Duff, 71-96.

<sup>1186</sup> Duff, 97-112.

<sup>1187</sup> Duff, 113-125.

<sup>1188</sup> Duff, 126-28

<sup>1189</sup> However, I see the Great Harlot involving anti-imperial and anti-Judaistic elements as well. For harlot Babylon as Jerusalem, see Beagley; Barker, 279-301; Corsini, 328-38.

## 2. A Specific Web of Associations Binding the ‘Jezebels’ and a Great Harlot

Greg Carey writes, ‘One of John’s techniques is to assign allusive names to his enemies’.<sup>1190</sup> The web of polemical associations that binds the ‘Jezebels’ (a queen and a self-claimed prophetess) and the Great Harlot of Rev 17-18 together occurs in the following manner:

- (A) The self-claimed prophetess ‘Jezebel’ is purposefully associated with Queen Jezebel through a name.
- (B) The Great Harlot is closely associated with Queen Jezebel through a number of similar characteristics.
- (C) Given (A) and (B), prophetess ‘Jezebel’ is thus indirectly associated with the Great Harlot. She further has some similar characteristics with the Great Harlot. A strong connection is thus made between the two.

In a table, the web of association looks like:

Association	Revelation	Relationship with	Old Testament
(A)	Prophetess ‘Jezebel’	named after, thus associated with	Queen Jezebel
(B)	Great Harlot	similar traits to, thus associated with	Queen Jezebel
(C)	Prophetess ‘Jezebel’ & Great Harlot	both are thus associated indirectly; and both share similar traits	

**Table 2 Associations between prophetess ‘Jezebel’, the Great Harlot and Queen Jezebel**

### (A) Association between the two ‘Jezebels’

The self-claimed prophetess in the church of Thyatira is pejoratively named after Queen Jezebel in the text. The naming of an opponent after a notorious figure provides the initial association between the two.<sup>1191</sup> Although the correlation is not

<sup>1190</sup> Carey, 141.

<sup>1191</sup> For another case of association of an NT character with an OT character through a name, see Stephen B. Chapman, ‘Saul/Paul: Onomastics, Typology and Christian Scripture’, in J. Ross Wagner, C. Kevin Rowe and A. Katherine Grieb (eds.), *The Word Leaps the Gap: Essays on Scripture and Theology in Honor of Richard Hays* (Grand Rapids: Mich.: Eerdmans, 2008), 214-43.

fully analogous and the characters do not match at every point, there are important similarities between them:

- (1) Both 'Jezebels' promote idolatry in some way. Queen Jezebel leads the Israelites into participation in the cults of Baal and Asherah; the prophetess 'Jezebel' leads members of the Christian community to participate in pagan contexts involving sacrifices/offerings to idols (Rev 2:20). This could mean, in the least, attendance in pagan sacrificial feasts or at the worst, full-fledged participation in pagan cultic rituals.
- (2) Both 'Jezebels' are accused of sexual immorality. The queen is accused of harlotries (כְּשָׁרָה) and acts of fornication (זִנְיָוִים, in plural; 2 Kgs 9:22), while the prophetess is accused of having improper sexual relations (μοιχεύω; πορνεία; Rev 2:20-22).
- (3) We see that the 'Jezebels' are both depicted as representatives of deities. Based on Chapter Eight (§1 and §2), Queen Jezebel appears to be a priestess of Baal and representative of Astarte and Asherah; prophetess 'Jezebel' claims to be a prophetess of an unspecified deity, perhaps God/Jesus, and perhaps acts as a mediator of a pagan counterpart.
- (4) Both 'Jezebels' promote idolatry by taking on prominent roles of authority within a community of God. Queen Jezebel wields authority in the royal court of Israel and promotes the cult of Baal and Asherah through her position (1 Kgs 18:19). Prophetess 'Jezebel' plays the role of a spokeswoman of God within the church of Thyatira, leading Christians to pagan syncretism (Rev 2:20, 23).<sup>1192</sup>

We thus see the two 'Jezebels' associated in major respects. Further correspondences between the two could lie in historical facts about the prophetess that remain unknown to us. A difference lies in the fact that Queen Jezebel murders God's prophets (1 Kgs 18:13; 2 Kgs 9:7), while the prophetess 'Jezebel' is not seen to do so. This murderous characteristic is shared instead with the Great Harlot, who is depicted as drunk with the blood of the saints and that of the witnesses to Jesus (Rev 17:6). The queenly status of Queen Jezebel is also not reflected in the

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<sup>1192</sup> See ch.6, §6.

prophetess. It is not known if she had any royal connections. But this trait is again reflected in the Great Harlot (18:7).

#### (B) Association of the Great Harlot and Queen Jezebel

There are many common traits between the Great Harlot and Queen Jezebel. These are listed in the table and further elaborated below.

Points of Similarity	Great Harlot in Revelation	Jezebel in OT
1	Depicted as goddess in one of her aspects (ch. 7, §2)	Depicted as goddess or goddess representative (ch. 8)
2	Accused of sexual misbehaviour and idolatry: called the 'mother of prostitutes and of the abominations of the earth' (Rev 17:5) and commits adultery with the kings and inhabitants of the earth (17:2)	Accused of sexual misbehaviour and idolatry: commits harlotries/fornications (2 Kgs 9:22) and idolatry (1 Kgs 18:19)
3	Persecutes the saints and those who bear testimony to Jesus (17:6)	Persecutes YHWH's prophets (1 Kgs 18:13; 2 Kgs 9:7)
4	Punishment foretold and died a gruesome death: flesh was eaten by a beast and was burnt (17:16)	Punishment foretold and died a gruesome death: flesh eaten by beasts, leaving little remains (2 Kgs 9:33-35)
5	Sits as a queen (18:7) and queen mother (cf. 17:5), connoting in part Agrippina the Younger and Messalina (ch. 7, §1)	Was a queen and queen mother (1 Kgs 16:31; 2 Kgs 10:13)
6	Practises magic (18:23)	Practises sorcery (2 Kgs 9:22)
7	Wealthy and lives luxuriously; mixes with royalties (17:4; 18:7); declares never to be a widow, but is struck with disaster (18:7-8)	Wealthy and lived luxuriously as queen; mixes with royalties; and is widowed.

**Table 3 Correlations between the Great Harlot and OT Jezebel**

Point1: As goddesses or goddess representative

I draw on observations made in Chapters Seven and Eight here. Both the Great Harlot and Queen Jezebel are seen to be associated with goddesses. I suggested that a part of the Great Harlot's image connotes major goddesses, such as Cybele (with Aphrodite), Isis and Roma. The most striking characteristics of her image would



relate to Cybele/the ‘Mother of the Gods’ and Aphrodite. Cybele is often depicted with beasts and is sometimes presented as riding a lion, just like the Great Harlot who sits on a beast. Aphrodite fits the bill of the Great Harlot’s title as ‘ἡ μήτηρ τῶν πορνῶν’. Aphrodite is known as the patron goddess of prostitutes among her various roles. As the Great Harlot is also ‘the great city that has a kingdom over the kings of the earth’ (17:18), which stands in a respect for imperial Rome, the goddess Roma, which is the personification of Rome and its populace, comes into the picture. Cybele also has a close relationship with Rome. The Phrygian goddess became the protector of the Roman state after her arrival in Rome in 204 B.C.E. Isis, being the goddess with many names, includes Cybele and Venus (Aphrodite) in her titles (cf. Apul. *Metam.* 11.5.1-22). Isis, with her consort Sarapis, was honoured by individual Flavian emperors for her role in their successes and for their protection (ch. 7, §2.2.1).

Queen Jezebel is depicted as a ‘woman at the window’ (2 Kgs 9:30-32). The ‘woman at the window’ is known either as Astarte or a temple servant of the goddess. Jezebel, being a queen, would likely have been in an exalted position close to the goddess herself, instead of being just an ordinary temple servant. For a first-century reader of 2 Kgs 9:30-32, Jezebel’s gaze from the window could call up the image of Aphrodite Parakypousa, who is an equivalent goddess to Astarte (ch. 8, §1 and §3). It is suggested that Jezebel also acts as a human representative of goddess Asherah. She was a great patroness of her cult, hosting close to a thousand prophets of Baal and Asherah regularly at her table (1 Kgs 18:19). Her position as the גְּבִירָה (great lady) and queen mother parallels that of goddess Asherah. She could have even held an analogous position to the goddess in the eyes of devotees of the cult (ch. 8, §2).

## Point 2: Accused of sexual misdemeanor and idolatry/pagan influences

Queen Jezebel is accused of acts of harlotry/fornication (2 Kgs 9:22). Her cultic association with Astarte (or the assimilated Aphrodite) could suggest sexual immorality in a literal sense. Her ‘harlotries’ (זְנוּנִים) could also have meant metaphorically as a reference to the ‘idolatry’ in which Jezebel was also deeply involved. As mentioned, she was likely a patroness of the cults of Baal and Asherah (cf. 1 Kgs 18:19). She could have been a priestess of Baal and a representative of Astarte and of Asherah (ch. 8, §1-2). Not only was she the promoter of idolatry

among the Israelites, she was also involved in contesting and murdering the prophets of YHWH.

Correspondingly, the Great Harlot is by name the ‘great prostitute’ (τῆς πόρνῃς τῆς μεγάλης; 17:1) and ‘the mother of prostitutes and of the abominations of the earth’ (ἡ μήτηρ τῶν πορνῶν καὶ τῶν βδελυγμάτων τῆς γῆς; 17:5). One of her aspect as Aphrodite, which I had suggested, would explain her title as ‘the mother of the prostitutes’. The Great Harlot’s ‘fornication’ (πορνεία) with the kings and inhabitants of the earth (17:2) could refer to unholy alliances formed in a metaphorical sense, but a literal interpretation of sexual license is also possible. The ‘abominations’ (βδέλυγμα) in the her title could be related to her acts of fornication<sup>1193</sup> or idolatry.<sup>1194</sup> Fornication and idolatry often occur together in Jewish prophetic discourse against apostasy.<sup>1195</sup> Like Queen Jezebel, the Great Harlot is suggested to take on the faces of pagan goddesses in her depiction. Representing pagan deities, she, like Queen Jezebel, would be the source of a pagan influence.

Interestingly, the Great Harlot wears a name on her forehead (Rev 17:5). This badge could have parodied the ornament that is sometimes found in depictions of the ‘woman at the window’, in whose shoes Queen Jezebel is cast in the Kings narrative. In an ivory inlay of the woman from Khorsabad:

[T]he goddess, waiting in the window of her sacred tavern, wears a distinctive ornament on her forehead. This rectangular-shaped object is decorated with a number of pendants in tear-drop form. This same frontlet is displayed on an image of Aštarte that occurs on a horse’s nosepiece from Nimrud.<sup>1196</sup>

This badge signifying a prostitute could relate to the ‘forehead of a whore’ (זִנְיָהּ ... מַצָּח) in Jer 3:3, befitting the Great Harlot’s identity as a ‘prostitute’. Besides Astarte, other goddesses related to prostitution, such as Kilili and Inanna-Ishtar, also wore an article of adornment on their forehead (a crown/tiara or a badge).<sup>1197</sup> Herodotus (1.199.2) describes women offering sexual services to strangers at the temple of Mylitta (the Assyrian Aphrodite) in Babylon wearing a wreath of cord

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<sup>1193</sup> LXX: Jer 13:27; Ezek. 6:9, 11ff.

<sup>1194</sup> LXX: Ezek 20:28-30; Wis. 14.11-12.

<sup>1195</sup> See references above.

<sup>1196</sup> Washbourne, 165, and figs. 1 and 2.

<sup>1197</sup> Washbourne, 164.

around their head.<sup>1198</sup> We see both the Queen Jezebel and the Great Harlot associated with sexual misbehaviour (literally-speaking) and having idolatrous influence on the people of God.

### Point 3: As persecutor of the people of God

Both the Great Harlot and Queen Jezebel are ferocious persecutors of the people of God. The Great Harlot is described figuratively as intoxicated from the blood of ‘the saints’ (τοῖς ἁγίοις) and the ‘witnesses’ (μάρτυρες) to Jesus (Rev 17:6; 18:24). Her city-aspect as imperial Rome correlates with her woman aspect at this point: Rome destroys Jerusalem—the holy (ἅγιος) city (11:2) and gives pressure to Christians (the saints) in the matter of the imperial cult. In her goddess aspect, her corresponding image as Dea Roma, which personifies Rome, could likewise be seen by Jews and Christians under pressure to take on an attribute of the persecutor.

Queen Jezebel is known to have persecuted the prophets of YHWH ferociously (1 Kgs 18:13; 2 Kgs 9:7) and have led the Israelites to do likewise (1 Kgs 19:10). Her ferocity in persecution led Elijah to think he was the only prophet left (1 Kgs 19:14). Queen Jezebel’s influence on the Israelites to commit idolatry is presented as thorough and pervasive, such that the Israelites are seen to have changed sides from YHWH to the pagan deities, Baal and Asherah (1 Kgs 19:14).

### Point 4: Punishment forecasted and a gruesome death

Both the Great Harlot and Queen Jezebel are depicted as dying in a gruesome way. The Great Harlot was killed by a beast and its accomplices, left naked, her flesh eaten and finally burnt (Rev 17:16). As a city, it was ‘fallen’ (ἔπεσεν; 18:2). Queen Jezebel’s death was equally dramatic. She was thrown down (fell) from a window, trampled by horses, eaten by beasts (dogs, or beastly men?), and left only her skull, feet and hands (2 Kgs 9:33-35). Both were left very desolate. Jezebel’s body remains would be beyond all recognition and lie as refuse on the ground (2 Kgs 9:37), while the Great Harlot would be annihilated and burnt (Rev 18:21-23). Both their deaths are prophesied and fated by God (2 Kgs 9:10 and Rev 14:8; 17:1ff.), being punished for their wicked deeds (2 Kgs 9:7; Rev 16:19; 18:4-7).

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<sup>1198</sup> Also, *EpJer* 43 (*Bar* 6.43); Washbourne, 164-65.

In terms of the Great Harlot as a tyrannical queen, Agrippina the Younger (queen mother of Nero), the plots of Nero and his accomplices to put her to death were equally dramatic (ch. 7, §1.2 ). In similarly terms, the death of Queen Jezebel (also a queen mother) is equally dramatic, and involved a main instigator (Jehu) and his accomplices (eunuchs; 2 Kgs 9:30-37).

#### Point 5: As queen and mother

The Great Harlot is described to ‘sit (enthroned) as queen’ (κάθηναι βασίλισσα; 18:7). She is dressed in royal colours of purple and scarlet with rich adornments (17:4). Interesting correlations exist between the Great Harlot as Agrippina the Younger and Queen Jezebel. Agrippina wielded much control over her husband Claudius and was powerful in the area of politics (ch. 7, §1.1 and 1.5). Similarly, Queen Jezebel had control over King Ahab and the affairs of the kingdom. She writes letters in his name using his seal (1 Kgs 21:8) and plots to acquire Naboth’s vineyard (1 Kgs 21:1-16). The passive Ahab is portrayed as a weakling, relative to his scheming and determined wife. Correspondingly, Agrippina the Younger is portrayed as a co-ruler with Emperor Claudius. Agrippina is seen to control the affairs of the state to suit her personal agenda. Like Ahab being manipulated by Jezebel, Claudius is depicted as a weak character outplayed by his wives (belittled by Messalina<sup>1199</sup> and manipulated by Agrippina<sup>1200</sup>). The plotting of Agrippina to ensure the accession of her son Nero corresponds to Queen Jezebel’s role as a queen mother, who has two sons (Ahaziah and Joram, cf. 1 Kgs 22:51; 2 Kgs 1:17; 3:1) on the throne in succession. It is not known whether Jezebel had to plot for their accession, but her role as queen mother in control of royal succession is comparable to that of Agrippina.

Another queen, Messalina, was suggested to be reflected in the Great Harlot’s depiction (in ch. 7; §§1.4-5). Notably, an event in Messalina’s life recalls similarities to the event of Jezebel acquiring Naboth’s vineyard through an unfair public prosecution of its owner (1 Kgs 21). Messalina had coveted the elaborate gardens of Lucullus that were beautified by Asiaticus. She directed both their prosecution and

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<sup>1199</sup> Messalina has outrageous affairs, right in the palace and in the brothel, playing a prostitute, and underwent a marriage ceremony to another behind Claudius’ back (see ch. 7, §1.4).

<sup>1200</sup> She made Nero the heir to the throne under Agrippina’s persuasion instead of having his own son Britannicus to succeed him (Tac. *Ann.* 13.2.2).

acquired the gardens (Tac. *Ann.* 11.1). She was later put to death finally in the same garden for her extra-marital ‘marriage’ to Silius.<sup>1201</sup> In the case of Jezebel and Ahab, it was Ahab who had coveted Naboth’s vineyard and Jezebel who subsequently acquired it by force for him through a mock prosecution. In this case, it was Messalina who coveted the gardens, not Claudius. Her befitting death in the same garden reminds of Ahab’s body being disposed off in the vineyard he had coveted and which Jezebel had confiscated (2 Kgs 9:26). This parallel between Queen Jezebel and Queen Messalina is intriguing. We see similar kinds of tyrannical and scheming queens in the face of the Great Harlot and Queen Jezebel.

#### Point 6: Dabbling in sorcery

Both the Great Harlot and Queen Jezebel are said to practice sorcery (φαρμακεία; Rev 18:23; LXX: 2 Kgs 9:22).<sup>1202</sup> A number of Graeco-Roman goddesses are known for magic practices. Goddesses such as Aphrodite, Isis and Cybele were part of the depiction of the Great Harlot. There is love magic in the cult of Aphrodite. In Homer’s *Iliad* 14.197-210, Hera deceives Aphrodite to make a charm to bring her separated parents together.<sup>1203</sup> Magic, such as love charms, are also known for Isis. Egyptian literature calls her ‘rich in magic’.<sup>1204</sup> Lucian’s *Philopseudes* 24 describes a sacred scribe living underground in crypts for twenty-three years, while being trained by Isis in magic.<sup>1205</sup> Isis was assimilated with Artemis,<sup>1206</sup> and magic was a notable component in the cult of Artemis. Artemis was ‘thought to have power superior to the astral powers who were believed to control the fate of people’.<sup>1207</sup> The

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<sup>1201</sup> Sandra R. Joshel, ‘Female Desire and the Discourse of Empire: Tacitus’s Messalina’, in Judith P. Hallett and Marilyn B. Skinner (eds.), *Roman Sexualities* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997), 221-54, see 228.

<sup>1202</sup> Φαρμακεία (sorcery) involves the use of drugs and magic to achieve a desired effect. Matthew Dillon, *Girls and Women in Classical Greek Religion* (London: Routledge, 2002), 169.

<sup>1203</sup> Christopher A. Faraone, *Ancient Greek Love Magic* (Cambridge: Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001), 97-98.

<sup>1204</sup> Reinhard Grieshammer, ‘Isis’, in *NewPauly* 1:965-72, see 965.

<sup>1205</sup> Daniel Ogden, *Magic, Witchcraft, and Ghosts in the Greek and Roman Worlds: A Sourcebook* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 54.

<sup>1206</sup> Reginald E. Witt, *Isis in the Ancient World* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1971), 148-49 and 141-51 for Isis’ assimilation with Artemis in general. Lynn R. Lidonnici, ‘The Images of Artemis Ephesia and Greco-Roman Worship: A Reconsideration’, *HTR* 85 (1992): 389-415, see 406-8.

<sup>1207</sup> Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians: Power and Magic* (SNTSMS 63; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 28.

apocryphal *Acts of John* (43) taunts the futility of the power of Artemis, her cult and her sorcery. It depicts the collapse of the temple of Artemis through a prayer (41-42). Besides Artemis' association with Isis, the Ephesian Artemis "appears to be a hybrid of Asian influences—perhaps chiefly from 'the Great Mother' (Cybele, Meter, Ma) of Phrygia and Lydia", but retaining some characteristics of the Greek goddess as huntress.<sup>1208</sup> The sorcery of the harlot that leads the nations astray (Rev 18:23) could be that of the goddesses. Queen Jezebel is also accused of sorcery in the OT, but the nature of it is not specified (2Kgs 9:22). It could have been related to the cult of Astarte, who was assimilated with Aphrodite, who was known for magical practices.

#### Point 7: Wealthy apparel, royal relations and widowhood

The Great Harlot is dressed luxuriously in the apparel of royalty (in fine linen, purple and scarlet) and with rich adornments (with gold, jewels and pearls; 17:4; 18:16). She lives in luxury (18:7, 9) and in royal circles. She fornicates with kings (18:9). Her wealth comes with her queenly status (18:7) and from the robust trading economy of Rome (18:11-13).

Jezebel, being a queen, is believed to be dressed richly and live luxuriously like the Great Harlot. King Ahab was an avid builder and among his building projects was an ivory palace (1 Kgs 22:39). Being a queen and queen mother with influence over courtly matters (cf. 1 Kgs 21:8), it is likely that Jezebel had shared in his affluence and luxury. Her ability to confiscate properties that were coveted by unfair means (e.g., Naboth's vineyard; 1 Kgs 21:1-16) suggests that she is able to get what she wants, by hook or by crook. Wealth was definitely a part of her lifestyle. As queens, the Great Harlot and Jezebel live in royal circles, though we do not know if Jezebel fornicates with kings in a literal sense. Metaphorically, inappropriate foreign political relations can be cast in the image of 'fornication' in the Bible (e.g., Ezek 23:1-21), as this involves adopting inappropriate pagan cult and customs (Hos. 8:9; 9:1-3).

The Great Harlot boasts that she is 'not a widow' (χήρα οὐκ εἰμι), but it is predicted that mourning/grief (πένθος) will overtake her (18:7-8). This 'mourning/grief' could be in the form of widowhood if the prediction is understood

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<sup>1208</sup> Arnold, 26.

as a contradiction to her boast. If this is the case, Queen Jezebel who was widowed at the death of King Ahab was not unlike her (1 Kgs 22:34-40).

In sum, we see the Great Harlot and Queen Jezebel sharing intriguing commonalities, especially if one takes into account the faces of goddesses and queens in their depictions. Some of the commonalities are overt, while others involve interpretation at the sub-text level of their depictions. We now look at the association between the Great Harlot and the NT 'Jezebel' in Revelation.

### (C) Associations between the Great Harlot and the prophetess 'Jezebel'

The correlations highlighted in (A) between the two 'Jezebels', and in (B) between the OT Jezebel and the Great Harlot would further encourage the reader to notice an indirect association between prophetess 'Jezebel' and the Great Harlot. This indirect association further strengthens some direct points of association presented below between the prophetess and the Great Harlot.

In Chapter Six, I suggested that the deviant behaviours, such as those of prophetess 'Jezebel' and related deviant groups (Nicolaitans, followers of Balaam's teaching) were generally, but not exclusively, set in social meals and συμπροσία that involved pagan/imperial cultic elements. 'Jezebel' is seen to be a leader of a guild/voluntary association that draws some of its members from the Thyatira church. Mysteries exclusively for an inner group of members are suspected to be part of their activities. We see the prophetess 'Jezebel' and the Great Harlot correlate further in this light.

#### (1) Both prophetess 'Jezebel' and the Great Harlot are related to pagan cults:

Prophetess 'Jezebel' as a religious leader encourages syncretistic behavior with pagan cults among her followers. She encourages them to eat sacrificial meat in contexts involving pagan worship, such as in the communal meals of guilds/voluntary associations. The Great Harlot takes on faces of major goddesses, which are meant to be represent pagan deities as a whole. Jezebel's activities in her guild/association could have directly or indirectly involved homage to pagan deities.

#### (2) It was earlier posited that the prophetess 'Jezebel' and like groups permit sexual immorality in the context of συμπροσία during social meals and feasts. The Great Harlot is correspondingly depicted as being 'drunk' (μεθύουσιν)

from a ‘golden cup’ (ποτήριον χρυσοῦν; 17:4). The cup, in a metaphorical way, holds the blood of her victims, and the uncleanness of fornication and abominable things (17:4, 6; 18:3). These are nonetheless intoxicating in the metaphor. We see that both prophetess ‘Jezebel’ and the Great Harlot are accused of debauchery, specifically, drunkenness and sexual immorality (πορνεία).

Likewise, the prophetess ‘Jezebel’ is accused of fornication and adultery (πορνεύω, 2:20; μοιχεύω, 2:21). A context for such behaviour could have been meal occasions and drinking sessions. The ‘cup’ of the Great Harlot recalls such a setting. In some instances, orgies under religious pretext, such as the mysteries, could have also taken place. The accusation of adultery with ‘Jezebel’ may indicate that ‘Jezebel’ was a married matron, since the *adulterium* is defined as sexual transgression with a married free woman in the imperial world.<sup>1209</sup> A convicted adulteress under Augustan legislation would be considered a ‘prostitute’ in her social status and was required to wear the toga, the attire of Roman citizens and prostitutes, instead of the stola of respectable Roman matrons.<sup>1210</sup> Whether this applied to ‘Jezebel’ or not, we still find ‘Jezebel’ associated rhetorically with the Great Harlot, who is a figure for sexual license.

- (3) ‘Jezebel’ is suggested in one of her roles to act as a ‘mystagogue’ who initiates followers into some form of mysteries. We know that she has a special exclusive kind of teaching for an inner group (called derogatorily ‘the deep things of Satan’; τὰ βάθη τοῦ σατανᾶ; Rev 2:20). Mysteries were common in pagan cults, and could have been part of her guild or association. If we for a moment take the liberty to interpolate along these lines, ‘Jezebel’ being a leader of the group could have impersonated a goddess during ritual performances. As Joan Connelly writes, ‘Ritual drama was widely practiced across ancient societies and, indeed, mimesis has even been viewed as the

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<sup>1209</sup> J. Ginsburg, 122, n. 61.

<sup>1210</sup> J. Ginsburg, 122, 127. Though the toga was associated with an adulteress or a prostitute in literary sources, in reality, prostitutes wore a variety of clothings. See Kelly Olson, ‘*Matrona* and Whore: Clothing and Definition in Roman Attire’, in Faraone and McClure (eds.), 186-204. The bejewelled harlot of Revelation dressed in striking colours could fit in some respect the picture of a seductive harlot. Cf. Olson, 194.



very origin of ritual'.<sup>1211</sup> If 'Jezebel' did play the role of a deity in some cultic functions, perhaps in the epiphany of mysteries,<sup>1212</sup> she would move a step closer to the goddess in the Great Harlot.

Comparatively, the Great Harlot bears the title 'μυστήριον'. Her startling appearance in a vision to John could have parodied an epiphany of a goddess in pagan mysteries. In this schema, an angel in the vision, akin to a 'mystagogue', leads John into the 'mystery' of the revealed harlot-goddess (17:7-18). John is amazed/astonished (θαυμάζω) at the sight of her (17:7-8), as would devotees when they catch sight of a magnificent goddess revealed at the climax of a mystery rite.<sup>1213</sup>

It is suggested that through these direct and indirect associations drawn between the Great Harlot and the prophetess 'Jezebel', a polemic against the latter is played out. The tragic fate of the Great Harlot (Rev 17:3, 16 and ch.18) is, in a way, a warning against 'Jezebel' and those who follow her ways of sexual immorality and who eat idol-food. In fact, both these offences are part of the attributes of the Great Harlot. As a mother of prostitutes, she represents the epitome of sexual misbehaviour, and with goddesses in her depiction, she stands for the very object of idolatry.

### **3. Conclusion**

The associations that bind a prophetess 'Jezebel' to the Great Harlot and an OT Queen of the same name intensify the polemic in Revelation against the prophetess. She is castigated subtly yet forcefully through a web of associations.

- (A) The naming of the prophetess after the Queen Jezebel brings to attention four points of correlations between them: both introduce pagan influences, commit sexual immorality, are depicted as goddesses or as a goddess-representative, and both have a prominent role among God's people.

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<sup>1211</sup> Joan Breton Connelly, *Portrait of a Priestess: Women and Ritual in Ancient Greece* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 104.

<sup>1212</sup> E.g., epiphany in Isis mysteries: Apul. *Metam.* 11.23.5-7.

<sup>1213</sup> The 'revealing' and 'expounding' (or 'showing' and 'telling') in the drama-like visions and choral parts in Revelation are akin to the enactment of sacred drama in the Eleusinian mysteries. For the 'revealing/expounding' in Eleusinian mysteries, see Sourvinou-Inwood, 167-8.

(B) The Great Harlot is noted to exhibit quite a number of striking correlations (more than seven<sup>1214</sup>) with Queen Jezebel. (For the list, see §2, Table 3.) Some of the correlations may seem more immediately apparent and others are more subtle. Points one, two and six of the correlations draw partly upon an earlier reading of ironic overtones worked into a ‘window scene’ (2 Kgs 9:30-37) that depict Queen Jezebel as Astarte/her representative, who is finally murdered in a gruesome way (ch. 8, §1). Besides a close connection with Astarte, Jezebel is also seen as the human counterpart of Asherah in her roles as the queen mother and ‘great lady’.

I suggested that the association of Queen Jezebel with the goddess Astarte and Asherah would not necessarily have been obscure to a first-century reader in the Graeco-Roman world. Astarte was a well-known goddess in the ANE tradition that had shaped the OT. The Greek Aphrodite Parakypousa, assimilated with Astarte, could be recalled in the image of a ‘woman at the window’. In addition, the cult of Astarte had spread to the wider Graeco-Roman world in the figure of Atargatis. This Syrian goddess had ‘maintained a solemn and influential presence throughout Hellenistic and Roman times, across the Mediterranean cities’.<sup>1215</sup> She is identified with a number of well-known Greek goddesses, including Isis, the Phrygian Cybele and Greek Hera.<sup>1216</sup>

The ANE goddess Asherah, in her own terms, is a well-known goddess in the OT. The Kings narrative depicts Asherah as associated with Maacah, another גְּבִירָה (‘great lady’) and queen mother (1 Kgs 15:2, 10). Such an association of being queen mother and ‘great lady’ with Asherah that I suggested for Queen Jezebel would not have necessarily been unfamiliar to readers of the OT in the first century.

(C) Prophetess ‘Jezebel’ is associated with Queen Jezebel by a deliberate nickname. We saw that the queen exhibits many points of correlation with the Great Harlot, including connotative elements in their depictions. Indirectly,

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<sup>1214</sup> Point seven is a combination of a few similarities

<sup>1215</sup> Ackroyd, ‘Goddess, Women and Jezebel’, 289; J. L. Lightfoot (ed.), *Lucian on the Syrian Goddess* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 84.

<sup>1216</sup> Ackroyd, ‘Goddess, Women and Jezebel’, 289.

prophetess 'Jezebel' is associated with the Great Harlot. In addition, we see the Great Harlot and prophetess 'Jezebel' correlated at three points in relation to the acts of idolatry: (i) The former encourages syncretistic participation with pagan and imperial cultic contexts by advocating the eating of food sacrificed to idols; the latter bears the face of goddesses and is the object of idolatry herself. (ii) The feasts and συμπροσία could be, as suggested, the context in which 'Jezebel' and like groups indulge in sexual license and eat idol-food. The golden cup of the Great Harlot, filled with intoxicating drink, could relate to the context of a συμπροσία. (iii) It is suggested that the ritual of 'Jezebel' might have included some sort of 'mysteries', in which her more esoteric teaching for an inner group is conveyed. Correspondingly, the Great Harlot, as a combination of great goddesses, bears the term 'μυστήριον' in her title. The revealing of her image in Rev 17:3-7 could have parodied the epiphany of a goddess in a mystery rite.

Although the vilification of prophetess 'Jezebel' takes on many forms in Revelation (Duff has suggested some forms; §1), this chapter has focused on the use of the Great Harlot and an OT Queen for the task, and on selected aspects of them, namely their faces of queens and goddesses. Pejorative connections start off with the bad-naming of one's opponent after a notorious figure, and continue with building a network of associations to bind the prophetess to a notorious queen and a Great Harlot. The Great Harlot is the most dramatically destroyed figure in Revelation. Her fall is made ironic with an extended lament (Rev 18) followed with great rejoicing (19:1-4). At her destruction, the root of all idolatrous influence, namely goddesses (or deities in general) represented in her, is seen to be destroyed. With that, acts of pagan syncretism and sexual immorality promoted by prophetess 'Jezebel' are castigated. Her followers and like company are reminded of their own imminent punishment if they remain unrepentant (Rev 2:22-23).

At another level of the polemic, the binding of prophetess 'Jezebel' to Queen Jezebel also associates the anti-pagan rhetoric in the Kings narrative to the polemic in Revelation. The dramatic death-scene of Queen Jezebel depicts the goddess or her representative as 'fallen' and gruesomely dismembered. Prophetess 'Jezebel' being associated with her is, thus, vilified in the unbecoming nature of her death. In addition, the derogatory association of the prophetess with a queen who was known to be an idolater and fornicator, and with a great harlot (ch. 17) relegates the

prophetess to the camp of the sinful, and robs her of the dignity she would have otherwise held as a prophetess. She and similar parties that remain unrepentant are in the imagery of Revelation ostracised from the beloved community of God, the Bride of Jesus—the Great Harlot being the Bride’s antithesis. The subtle yet intensive polemic serves an inherently didactic purpose to warn ‘Jezebel’, her followers and similar groups against deviant behaviour. The polemic in the ‘vision narrative’ (what I call chs. 4-22) against the prophetess can be categorized as ‘hidden’ because ‘Jezebel’ is not named there in Rev 17-18. Yet, this kind of polemic becomes more forceful than a direct kind (e.g., 2:20-23), once the message finally gets through. The false prophetess, in this reading, is called two names instead of one: (Queen) Jezebel and the Great Harlot.

## **PART FOUR—ON CONCLUDING MATTERS**

### **Chapter Ten: Conclusion, Highlighted Co(n)texts and Polemic in Revelation**

In this thesis (‘*Windows to the Polemics against the so-called Jews and Jezebel in Revelation: Insights from Historical and Co(n)textual Analysis*’), I have taken the reader through a study of selected backgrounds and co(n)texts (mainly social-historical ones) which act as ‘*windows*’ into the polemic against the ‘Jews’ and their synagogue, and against a prophetess called ‘Jezebel’. The ‘*windows*’ presented perspectives that help to make sense of the underlying issues to the anti-Judaistic and anti-Jezebelian polemic. I also demonstrated a specific rhetorical delivery against the prophetess Jezebel enacted through a web of associations (These and other findings form the ‘*insights*’.)

In Part One, as a form of preliminary work, I provided a starting point for historical connections through a study of the narrative structure. Allusions to historical events and persons worked into the narrative design acted as a starting ‘historical anchorage’ of the interpretation of the book. In Part Two, I developed contexts led about by this historical ‘handhold’ that help give a general backdrop to understand the triggering issue for the author’s polemic against the so-called ‘Jews’. In Part Three, I suggested a general context for the paired offences of sexual immorality and eating idol-food (Rev 2:14-15, 20-24), and performed a social-historical study of specific aspects of three women figures (prophetess ‘Jezebel’, the Great Harlot and Queen Jezebel). I finally demonstrated a polemic delivery inherent in the text against the prophetess named ‘Jezebel’ through a web of derogatory associations that involves the three above-mentioned figures studied in their social-historical contexts. In Part Four (the present chapter), I conclude the thesis and draw out some further significance of it. I will also highlight how actually the polemic against the ‘Jews’ and ‘Jezebel’ are two sides of a multi-sided prism reflecting an anti-syncretistic concern against Judaistic and ‘pagan/secular’ influences, that also involves an imperial aspect (§2.1 below).

As windows of a building offer different views for a scenic observer (some look out into the front garden, some onto the backyard and others onto the street), I first highlight some ‘side-views’ derived from the process of research. I next present a ‘central-view’ on the insights gathered about the polemic against the ‘Jews’ and

‘Jezebel’. A panoramic view capturing every related aspect of the polemic would be ideal, but it is a luxury impossible to achieve here. Instead, various scenic sections contribute, in different degrees, to the sense of the polemic at hand.

### ***1. Side Contributions: Historical Contexts for Reading Revelation***

Quite some groundwork was done to finally arrive at a way forward to interpret the slippery images of Revelation. Below I highlight some significant results of this process that could have impact on the future study of Revelation.

#### **1.1. Titus as the beast from the sea-abyss**

In Chapter Two and Three, I observed an interesting, yet little noticed, connection between the first and second woes (8:13-9:21; parts of 11:1-14) and the Jewish war resulting in the fall of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. (ch. 2, §2.1). Parallels to the Jewish war, such as a five-month siege-like situation (cf. 9:10), allow a more specific connection to be made with the siege of Jerusalem conducted by a would-be emperor, Titus. One detects a connection between the angel-king of the abyss (9:1-2, 11), identified as general Titus (ch. 2, §2.2), and the beast from the abyss-sea (13:1 and 17:8). The 3 ½-year period of the beast’s reign, alluding to the 3 ½-year period of the Jewish war up till the destruction of the Jerusalem temple, is the period covering the first to the third woe. Though Titus did not rise to prominence at the beginning (but towards the end) of the 3 ½-year period, historically speaking, it appears that the details of the war and those of a prominent general are fused together creatively in the allusions of the text. Given that Titus is identified as the ‘beast from the sea-abyss’, one is led to consider the three Flavian emperors and the Flavian cult as ‘templates’ (in a crude sense) for the depiction of the ‘Satanic trio’ (a dragon and two beasts) and their cult (Rev 12-13; ch. 3).

It is further posited that the Flavian cult acts reasonably as a backdrop to the cultic scene in Rev 13:15. Historically, Domitian fits the role of the ‘beast from the land’ as the promoter of the Flavian cult, including the worship of Titus (ch. 3, §1). The author adopts materials from socio-historical circumstances and transforms them creatively. So an exact allegorical reading with the historical characters and circumstances for all the details in the imagery may not be appropriate. Nonetheless, a sufficient convergence of details allows recognition of allusions to socio-historical circumstances to be made. Past scholarship has shown that many possibilities can

result from the counting of emperors in Rev 17:10. A surer identification of the eighth emperor (the ‘beast from the sea-abyss’), I suggest, lies in the identification of the ‘beast from the sea-abyss’ in relation to the Jewish war. In this light, many social-historical convergences to the characters and context of Revelation can be observed (chs. 2-4).

## 1.2. A real crisis in late Domitianic time

In Chapter Four, I suggested that there was a real situation of crisis for Christians during Domitian’s reign. Scholarship now generally maintains that Domitian’s time did not present any particular difficulty for Christians. To explain the tone of suffering and vengeance in Revelation, scholars turn to the concept of a ‘perceived crisis’ that lies mainly at the psychologically level,<sup>1217</sup> or a kind construed by the author to reflect conflicting ideology with the world order.<sup>1218</sup> Even though these are not impossible suggestions, Christians did face real difficulties in Domitian’s last years, which could have amounted to a few years of social threat.

In relation to Domitian’s rigorous exaction of the Jewish tax, Christian Jews who, perhaps, had distanced themselves from the synagogue and stopped paying the tax could have been accused of tax evasion. Alternatively, some Christian Jews who had continued to pay the tax and remained quietly as members of Judaism, could have been accused of using Judaism to hide their Christian faith, when discovered to be apostates. The charge could consist of *maiestas* (treason) for trying to avoid participation in the imperial cult, especially that Flavian cult was in operation in Asia Minor from 90 C.E. Such an accusation could have come from synagogal members who were unhappy about a Jew’s change in religious affiliation or from members of the public at odds with Christians. Though the matter of the Jewish tax implicated Christian Jews most of all, some gentile judaizers could also have been wrongly accused in relation to it.

During the concurrent period of widespread accusations in Domitian’s last years, many ‘drifting into’ (ἐξοκέλλοντες) Jewish customs/lifestyle were accused of ἀθεότης, ἀσέβεια or *maiestas* (Cass. Dio, 67.14.2; 68.1.2), probably in relation to their refusal to participate in pagan and imperial cults. Among those drifting into

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<sup>1217</sup> Yarbrow Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 84-107.

<sup>1218</sup> See L. L. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, 174-75.

Jewish customs/lifestyle, I argue, were many Christian judaizers, since Jews could not be rightly accused of adherence to their ancestral customs, nor described as ‘drifting into’ them; while polytheistic pagan judaizers (not converts to Judaism) would have no problem with pagan and imperial cults. Christians were the most vulnerable to the accusations of ἁθεότης, ἁσέβεια and *maiestas*. Besides, the strict exaction of the tax had perhaps resulted in a need for a clear distinction between a liable Jew and a non-liaible (gentile) judaizer. As a result, judaizers (including Christian ones) tagging at the fringes of the synagogal communities and whose identity were ambiguous, were brought into attention. Furthermore, Domitian’s brief decree to hunt down Jews of Davidic descendants toward the end of his reign (Eus. *Hist. Eccl.* 3.20.1-2) also implicated some Jewish Christians, such as the grandchildren of Jude (the brother of Jesus). This would have caused alarm in Jewish-Christian circles. All these factors together would have amounted to a situation of crisis for Christians late in Domitian’s time.

### 1.3. Prominence of Flavian emperors and matters of dating

The above identifications of the ‘beast from the sea-abyss’ as Titus, and the Satanic trio as having characteristics of the Flavian dynasty and cult suggest the prominence of the Flavian period behind major scenes of Revelation (Rev 9, 11 and 13). Nero and characters in the Claudian period (such as Agrippina the Younger and Messalina) were also featured in the Great Harlot’s depiction of Rev 17 (ch. 7, §1). As a whole, we see the author employing materials at least up to Domitian’s time in the ‘vision narrative’ (Rev 2-3, or simply called, ‘visions’). This prominence of the Flavian emperors in the ‘visions’ coheres with the common attestation by early commentators that John ‘saw’ the visions towards the end of Domitian’s reign (ch. 1, §3.1). In this light, John on the island of Patmos was shown visions relating to events across the Aegean Sea: the crisis affecting the churches in Asia Minor. Such identification of the Flavian emperors as the Satanic trio has received attention.

I understand Rev 17:10, indicating the king that ‘is’, as allowing the reader to understand the vision of the harlot-on-beast (17:3-6) from the temporal perspective of 68/69 C.E. (soon after the fall of Nero, the fifth king). The reader is brought back in time, and is invited to see later (past) circumstances up to the Flavian period recast in apocalyptic terms. From this narrative temporal perspective, the ‘harlot’ as, in part, Agrippina the Younger in relation to the beast on which she sits, Nero (ch. 7;



§1), is someone who is a near contemporary. The Jewish revolt ‘is’ still in the process and about to be quelled by Titus, the general. These characters are contemporary or recent personalities from that narrative temporal perspective.

One could, of course, still take Rev 17:10 to indicate a ‘real’ time of 68/69 C.E. of John viewing the vision of the harlot-on-beast, but this would contradict the majority view of early commentators that John saw the ‘visions’ towards the end of Domitian’s reign (ch. 1, §3.1). The prominence of Flavian depictions in the images would also suggest a dating for the work as late as the Flavian period. Given the subversive depiction of the Flavian emperors as the Satanic trio, it would be hard for John to emerge alive if he had circulated the work in Domitian’s time, especially that Domitian was known to be a ruthless exterminator of opposers. In addition, the ‘letters’ do not appear to reflect the kind of distress one would expect during Domitian’s last years. Except for one instance of βλασφημία from the so-called ‘Jews’ in Smyrna and a forecast of ‘trouble/distress’ (θλίψις) for ‘ten days’ (ἡμερῶν δέκα; 2:9), one does not sense severe threats from the public nor from the synagogue. No doubt, tension with some Jews from the synagogue of Smyrna and Philadelphia is depicted, but no tangible harm is expressed in for Christians in the latter city. We also detect spiritual threats of compromise with the prevailing culture in four ‘letters’ (2:14-15; 2:20-23; 3:1-3; 3:14-18). Such occasional slander/blasphemy coupled with general compromise with the prevailing culture reflects a normal situation, not a crisis. So though the ‘visions’ could have used the Flavian period, and the crisis toward end Domitianic time as background, the ‘letters’ reflect a time after when the many false accusations were curbed. Befitting our scenario, Victorinus of Pettau wrote that Revelation was delivered to the church after John had returned from labour in the mines at Patmos (*Commentary on the Apocalypse* 10.11). We are left to speculate how long after the death of Domitian the visions were delivered to the churches. A Nervian date would be more immediate if the visions were delivered soon after, and there is no reason to suspect that John had kept the visions secret for a long time (cf. 22:10). Whatever date, my interpretation of the polemical issue against the so-called ‘Jews’ and the prophetess ‘Jezebel’ would still apply, as I had largely drawn upon general socio-historical circumstances for its reconstruction: namely, a common phenomenon of Christian judaizing at the end of first century and beyond, and an on-going pressure to participate in the pagan

and imperial cult and in the prevailing culture of the time. Even after the Flavian dynasty, imperial cults in Asia Minor continued to flourish.<sup>1219</sup> If Revelation was delivered soon after Domitian's death, the recent crisis during Domitian's time featured in the 'visions' (such as ch. 13), as I argue, could have reminded Christians to stand firm even in normal circumstances and to brace themselves for any future crisis.

## **2. Central Contribution: Reading Aspects of Polemic in Revelation**

Moving on to the polemic against the 'Jews' and 'Jezebel', I first present the picture of the context of polemic against these contenders. Following that, I will highlight an aspect of the polemic against Jezebel that has so far received little notice.

### **2.1. Issues at hand in the anti-Judaistic and anti-Jezebelian polemic**

Revelation is seen to be a masterpiece with a rhetorical focus. It is argued that the 'letters' (chs. 2-3) and 'visions' (chs. 4-22) both contribute to an intense delivery of the author's main concern. His concern, as I have suggested (see ch. 5, §1.3), is reflected in the three angels flying in mid-air (Rev 14:6-12). As our focus is on polemics, we will focus on the second and third proclamations that are conveyed in very negative terms:

Καὶ ἄλλος δεύτερος [ἄγγελος] ἠκολούθησεν λέγων, Ἐπεσεν, ἔπεσεν Βαβυλὼν ἡ μεγάλη, ἣ ἐκ τοῦ οἴνου τοῦ θυμοῦ τῆς πορνείας αὐτῆς πεπότικεν πάντα τὰ ἔθνη. (14:8)

Καὶ ἄλλος ἄγγελος τρίτος ἠκολούθησεν αὐτοῖς λέγων ἐν φωνῇ μεγάλῃ, Εἴ τις προσκυνεῖ τὸ θηρίον καὶ τὴν εἰκόνα αὐτοῦ, καὶ λαμβάνει χάραγμα ἐπὶ τοῦ μετώπου αὐτοῦ ἢ ἐπὶ τὴν χεῖρα αὐτοῦ, 10 καὶ αὐτὸς πίεται ἐκ τοῦ οἴνου τοῦ θυμοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ κεκερασμένου ἀκράτου ἐν τῷ ποτηρίῳ τῆς ὀργῆς αὐτοῦ, καὶ βασανισθήσεται ἐν πυρὶ καὶ θείῳ ἐνώπιον ἀγγέλων ἁγίων καὶ ἐνώπιον τοῦ ἁρνίου.... (14:9-11)

#### **2.1.1 Anti-judaistic polemic and the imperial cult**

In Chapter Five, I interpreted verses 9-11 as prohibiting (1) participation in the imperial cult (worship of the beast and its image), and (2) judaizing behaviour (receiving its mark). The former point is self-apparent, but the latter about the mark

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<sup>1219</sup> S. Price, *Rituals and Power*, reveals the prominence of the imperial cult in Asia Minor in the first three centuries.

of the beast on the forehead or (right) hand (cf. 13:16) is obscure at the first sight. A correspondence in the latter with a description in *m. Megillah* 4.8 on heretical ways of wearing the tefillin is observed. It is thus possible to read the mark placed on the forehead and right hand as a representation of the tefillin worn in a ‘heretical’ manner by adherents to Jewish customs outside Rabbinic Judaism. These could have included Christian Jews and Christian gentiles (ch. 5, §1.1). Some Christians could have adopted Jewish customs (such as wearing the tefillin) to feign affiliation with the synagogue.<sup>1220</sup> Judaism was a traditional religion, thus a recognised one from the Roman perspective, while Christianity was not. The synagogues, being better established than churches in the society, could have attracted Christians who had wanted an excuse to avoid the imperial cult. Judaism would have been a convenient cover. This act of ‘judaizing’ ironically renders the tefillin a ‘phylactery’ (protective amulet), as the tefillin is sometimes called (Matt 23:5). Donning the tefillin, or the adherence to Jewish customs, becomes a way for Christians to feign affiliation with Judaism.<sup>1221</sup> Judaizing behaviour is observed to be common in Asia Minor in the first few centuries (ch. 5, §1.2). Some Christians could have viewed participation in imperial and pagan cults as forbidden, but could have considered affiliation with the synagogue acceptable. Some Christian Jews could have continued to maintain close contact with the Jewish community, while gentile Christians could have joined in the crowd when circumstances called for it.

The ‘letters’ in Revelation report some tensions between the so-called ‘Jews’ from a synagogue and the churches in Smyrna and Philadelphia. I read the so-called ‘Jews’ mainly to be ethnic Jews belonging to a synagogue (ch. 5, §2). The author juxtaposes the βλασφημία of some Jews in Smyrna with an impending imprisonment of some Christians (2:9-10), suggesting indirectly a relation between the events. The tension between the Jews and the church in Philadelphia is even more vaguely portrayed (3:10). Through ambiguous depictions of threats and tensions (2:9-10; 3:9-10), the author drives a wedge between Christians and the synagogues in the minds of the readers. Not only does the author deny the opposing Jews their honourable heritage, he names their synagogue after Satan. ‘Satan’ is the worst label

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<sup>1220</sup> Also suggested by Carey, 20.

<sup>1221</sup> Incidentally, the Shema which is recited as part of the prayer with the tefillin proclaims a monotheistic concept of God (Deut 6:4). For a discussion on the tefillin and the Shema, see Paul Foster, ‘Did Matthew Get the Shema Wrong? A Study of Matthew 22:37’, *JBL* 122 (2003): 309-333.

to give one's religious enemy. The synagogue is not only seen to be threatening, it is portrayed as the archenemy of God, diametrically opposed to God's people, the church. The author, I suggest, is actually making a statement of non-alliance with the synagogue. He is essentially saying in Rev 14:9-11, Rev 2:9-10 and 3:9 that Christians should not sacrifice to the emperor nor seek affiliation with the synagogue as an alternative way out. Christians not affiliating with imperial and Judaistic powers would find themselves in 'no man's land'. It is no wonder that together with the prohibition in 14:9 against affinity with the imperial cult and synagogue, Christians are called to remain faithful even to the point of death (14:12-13). The destiny for those who 'apostasize' in either direction is described in repelling and obnoxious terms (14:10-11). Both the offences of imperial worship and synagogue affiliation are depicted as from one source, the 'beast from the sea', whose authority derives from Satan. Creatively, the author gathers two different powers together in one united camp and smears them together with the same brush.<sup>1222</sup>

If the context of the 'letters' reflects a time of relative peace after the crisis under Domitian, allusions to the Domitianic crisis in the visions could be seen as a real life lesson helping the readers heed the warnings in 14:9-10. The expression 'Ὡς δὲ ἡ ὑπομονὴ τῶν ἁγίων ἐστίν' in 13:12 points to an example of faithful endurance even to death under the threats of the beast (vv. 9-11, 13). This extreme example of endurance in a crisis, such as in time of Domitian that is alluded to, would provide comfort and encouragement to Christians in less threatening circumstances. In addition, the slander/blasphemy reflected in the letter to the church in Smyrna (2:9-10) could have brought back memories of the unsettled moments of tax investigation and calumny during late Domitianic time. During such a time, adopting 'Jewish ways' became not an asset but a liability. This could have further cautioned readers to think twice about affiliating with the synagogue.

Looking at the matter, it may be more specific to label the rhetoric against Jews and synagogue as 'anti-Judaistic' (i.e., against entities of Judaism), instead of anti-'Semitic' or anti-'Jewish'. Philip Mayo rightly notes that John is likely a Jew, and that he employs OT imagery to show the fulfilment of God's plan in a 'new *spiritual* Israel'. The 'Christianizing of Jewish Scriptures', as Mayo argues for

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<sup>1222</sup> Carey, 141-49, writes of the author's technique of 'identification', i.e., drawing associations. Through this technique, he 'levels all differences' among the various opponents. Carey, 149.

imagery in Revelation,<sup>1223</sup> shows that the author sees his Jewish roots as valuable to be recast in Christian terms. I have set this ‘anti-Judaistic’ rhetoric as an inner-church conversation. The polemic is seen not to ‘pick a fight’ with members of the synagogue, but is directed only at Christians who felt attracted to affiliate with the synagogue.

Would the anti-Judaistic rhetoric stand in a trajectory of ‘*Adversus Judaeos*’ discourses by Christian writers across the centuries?<sup>1224</sup> Not all authors clarify the purpose of their polemical writings. But in John Chrysostom’s homilies, *Adversus Judaeos*, we see a similar purpose of dissuading Christians from judaizing and associating with the synagogue.<sup>1225</sup> In his rhetoric, there is similarly a ‘satanization’ of the synagogue. He calls the synagogue ‘a dwelling of demons’ (*habitatio daemonum*; τῶν δαιμόνων καταγώγιον; 1.3.1),<sup>1226</sup> amidst a host of pejoratives. It is unfortunate that the homilies had, in the words of Perry and Schweitzer, ‘molded the outlook of Christians for centuries and contributed to antisemitic’s lethal power’,<sup>1227</sup> even though John Chrysostom was speaking to Christians and did not mean to ‘pick any fight’ with the synagogue. This reminds us of the importance of understanding the context of polemic in Revelation rightly.

#### 2.1.2 Anti-Jezebelian polemic in perspective (*vis-à-vis* the anti-Judaistic polemic)

We now turn to the other prong of polemical attack in Revelation against Jezebel and what she stands for. In my reconstruction of the social circumstance in Chapter Six, Jezebel could have been a patroness and cult leader of a trade guild in Thyatira. Trade guilds were very common in Thyatira. These guilds invariably honoured some patron deities, and sought imperial favour by honouring the emperor. Though Jezebel also ‘camouflaged’ herself as a Christian prophet in another voluntary association, the ἐκκλησία in Thyatira, she is seen to have drawn some members from the church

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<sup>1223</sup> Mayo, 24-26.

<sup>1224</sup> E.g., Tert. *Adv. Jud.*; John Chrys. *Adv. Jud.*

<sup>1225</sup> E.g., 1.5; 6.6; 8.4. For an anthology of texts reflecting this, see Marvin Perry and Frederick M. Schweitzer (eds.), *Antisemitic Myths: A Historical and Contemporary Anthology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 6-10; see also, Robert L. Wilken, *John Chrysostom and the Jews: Rhetoric and Reality in the Late Fourth Century* (Berkeley: University of California, 1983), 73-79.

<sup>1226</sup> S. P. N. Joannis Chrysostomi, *Opera Omnia Quae Exstant* (18 vols.; Patrologiae Cursus Completus; Paris: J. -P Migne; 1859-62), XLVIII.847-48; cf. Perry and Schweitzer (eds.), 6-7.

<sup>1227</sup> Perry and Schweitzer (eds.), 6.

for her guild/association. The ‘initiated’ members had access to some kind of exclusive teaching (cf. 2:24), which leads one to think that some kind of ‘mysteries’ was part of their programme.

The anti-Jezebelian rhetoric warns against two common sins of syncretism with the pagan-imperial cult and culture: sexual immorality and eating idol-food. I demonstrated that sexual immorality and eating food/meat offered to idols were not uncommon in the context of social meals. Although not all meals were licentious, drunkenness and sexual ‘entertainment’ were pretty common during meals and *συμπόσια*. Besides, idol-food (sacrificed meat or other meal offerings to idols) was commonly encountered in communal meals. Such meals invariably included rituals that honoured pagan/imperial deities. Moreover, communal meals were an integral part of voluntary associations, festivals and a full range of social occasions. A permissive attitude towards eating sacrificial meat would have easily translated into full-fledged participation in pagan worship. Pagan rituals were common in social meal contexts. Probably, the author of Revelation was not prohibiting the attendance of all such meal occasions, which would have been impossible. His concern was probably mainly with acts of idolatry (cf. 13:15) that could be involved.

Among the churches of Asia Minor, no less than three distinct groups were seen to indulge in sexual immorality and eating idol-food: the Jezebelian group, the Nicolaitans and the followers of Balaam’s teaching. Three churches (Ephesus, Pergamum and Thyatira) were explicitly mentioned to have encountered the influences of such groups. Moreover, syncretism with pagan culture is also detected among the churches of Sardis and Laodicea (3:1-5, 15-18). There is reason to suspect that other churches in Asia Minor were also affected by syncretistic influences of the pagan-imperial culture. The polemic against Jezebel also stands as a polemic against syncretistic behaviour.

Such ‘anti-Jezebelian’ kind of polemic is observed to extend beyond the ‘letters’ (chs. 2-3) into the ‘vision narrative’ (ch. 4-22) of Revelation. The second proclamation of the three angels (mentioned above, §2.1 para. 1) concerns the destruction of Babylon. The Great Harlot/Babylon is couched in a metaphor of drunkenness and sexual immorality (14:8), which relates to the offences of Jezebel. In Chapter Nine, supplementing Duff’s reading of polemic in the ‘visions’ against Jezebel, I showed that the depictions of the Great Harlot and an OT queen play a part in the author’s invective against her (more below).

Looking at the broader context of the polemic in Revelation, we see a didactic purpose: to define the borders of what consists acceptable Christian behaviour in an imperial society. Through an anti-Jezebelian polemic, the author guards against behaviours, sexual or dietary, that would easily land a Christian into contexts of pagan and imperial worship. Since full participation in a pagan community was not possible for Christians, the synagogal community, which was more socially established than the church yet holding a similar monotheistic faith, could be an alternative community for Christians to find a sense of social acceptance. The anti-Judaistic polemic warns against this other attraction on top of the anti-Jezebelian polemic against pagan involvement.

## 2.2. Derogatory associations in the 'anti-Jezebelian' polemic: the 'Jezebels' and a Great Harlot

The other main contribution of the thesis is a reading of the anti-Jezebelian polemic at a sub-text level (in-between-the-lines) involving intratexts (Rev 17-18) and intertexts (the OT Kings narrative, especially 2 Kgs 9). What we see as an explosive speech against Jezebel in Rev 2:20-23 is only the tip of the polemical iceberg. As mentioned, an 'anti-Jezebelian' rhetoric extends to the 'visions' particularly in the Great Harlot's depiction (together with an OT queen).

Three character-constructs read against their socio-historical milieu were formed. In *Chapter Six*, 'Jezebel' was posited to be a leader of a guild/association having pagan cultic elements, such as the mysteries. She is seen to draw some members for her guild from the Thyatiran church. The offences of sexual immorality and eating idol-food that she promotes could have taken place in the social meals and banquets of her guild/association. It was shown that eating sacrificial meat was very common in such occasions, while debauchery (heavy drinking and sexual license) in feasting was not uncommon.

In *Chapter Seven*, I highlighted connotations in the woman portrayal of Great Harlot, particularly in terms of the images of queens and goddesses. Tyrannical queens, Agrippina the Younger and perhaps Messalina, are seen in her depiction. Imperial queens were often assimilated to goddesses, and this supports the notion that popular goddesses, such as Isis, Cybele, Aphrodite and Roma, could have also contributed to the Great Harlot's image. My identification of particular queens and goddesses for the study is meant to be suggestive, not exhaustive. Allusive

connections and not full analogy to individuals are observed. Though different images are juxtaposed within the Great Harlot's image, sufficient points of correlations have allowed specific and collective identifications to take place.

Next in *Chapter Eight*, I studied the depiction of Queen Jezebel in the Kings narrative. The OT depiction of Jezebel's death scene (2 Kgs 9:30-37) is ridden with mysterious details. Jezebel is depicted as a painted woman at the window. Being pushed by eunuchs and falling to death, the grisly remains of her body leave the reader wondering at the meaning of it all. With the prevailing ANE culture as background, such details begin to make sense as a polemic against her.<sup>1228</sup> The 'woman at the window' is known to be a representation of goddess Astarte or as her temple servant (ch. 8, §1). Scholars have posited a sexual role in the 'woman at the window'. The myth of the sacred marriage in the ANE tradition could have been involved in the scene of Jezebel at the window. The historicity of the institution is very much debated, but mythological elements could have been incorporated into a depiction for evocative purposes. Jezebel's crime of many harlotries and sorceries (2 Kgs 9:22) could have been due to her cultic role in the cult of Astarte (who was assimilated with Aphrodite Parakypusa), but we do not know much about the specifics of this. Jezebel, as the patroness of the cult of another goddess, Asherah, could have been viewed as the goddess representative or even as the goddess incarnate by devotees. As Asherah, Jezebel plays the role of the 'great lady' (גְּבִירָה) and queen mother. In the literal 'fall' of Jezebel, her power as the great lady and queen mother is put to an end. The goddesses she connotes are also metaphorically destroyed at her fall. The 'קְלָבִים' (likely another term for male prostitutes besides its literal meaning as 'dogs') harassing and consuming her body, and her remaining 'hands' and 'feet', which could be euphemistic expressions for sexual organs, could have added to the irony of the account. A queen accused of murder and harlotries receives her due emphatically in an ironic way.

Through an association evoked by a name/nickname the reader is alerted to possible associations made between the prophetess 'Jezebel' and an OT queen. A number of marked correspondences further confirm the association between them.

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<sup>1228</sup> Likewise, the ANE chaos monster myth can be seen to lie in the background of some OT texts and in Revelation in the dragon and the beasts. See Carey, 144-45; Yarbrow Collins, *The Combat Myth*. For methodology issues of engaging the ANE context in reading biblical texts, see C. Hays, 20-43. Christopher Hays tries ingenuously to address the criteria of spotting allusions to ANE co-texts for reading the OT.



Furthermore, the depiction of this OT queen in the Kings narrative is also observed to bear a good number of correspondences with the Great Harlot's depiction in Revelation. At a first glance, one would not have immediately thought of associating the two, but a comparison between them yields a full range of correspondences at both the surface and subtext levels. One of course cannot claim that the full set of connotations was picked up by all first-century readers in the churches of Asia Minor.<sup>1229</sup> But Queen Jezebel would have been a well-known biblical character to them. Furthermore, the goddesses whom she is seen to reflect were assimilated with goddesses in the Graeco-Roman world, such as Aphrodite (with Astarte) and Atargatis (with Astarte and Asherah).<sup>1230</sup> Apart from the more subtle 'goddess image' of Queen Jezebel and the Great Harlot (ch. 9, § 2 (B), point 1), there were at least six points of correspondence between the queen and the Great Harlot at the surface level of the text (points 2 to 7).

The associations of the two 'Jezebels' and a Great Harlot would encourage the reader to make an indirect association between the Great Harlot and the prophetess Jezebel in Revelation. Furthermore, three direct points of association between the latter two are also observed: (1) Both of them have connections with pagan cults. The prophetess advocates syncretistic behaviour of eating idol-food, while the Great Harlot connotes goddesses worshipped in pagan rites. (2) Both are involved in gross sexual misdemeanour. Contexts involving food, wine and intoxication, such as communal meals and drinking parties, were possible occasions where such acts occur. The imagery of the Harlot being intoxicated from the contents of a golden cup resonates with these contexts (17:4, 6). The golden cup as a cultic vessel would also bring to mind the libation ritual or the sacred cup of deities toasted in a *συνπρωσίον*.<sup>1231</sup> (3) Both the prophetess and the Great Harlot are seen to be involved in pagan 'mysteries'. Jezebel's esoteric teaching known only to an inner

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<sup>1229</sup> There were ancient works which promoted the knowledge of ancient deities to readers in the Graeco-Roman world. See C. Hays, 41.

<sup>1230</sup> For the shared characteristics of Astarte and Asherah with Atargatis, see R. A. Oden, *Studies in Lucian's De Syria Dea* (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1977), 99-103. He suggests that Atargatis is also related to 'Anat in terms of etymology of her name, but less in terms of attributes. Oden, 104-5. Though there are shared attributes, Lightfoot doubts a direct connection between Atargatis and Asherah, but suggests a connection through Cybele in terms of the epithet of 'creatress/mother of the gods'. See Lightfoot, 14-15.

<sup>1231</sup> For the rituals, see Delight Tolles, *The Banquet-Libations of the Greeks* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Edwards Brothers, 1943), 38-73 and 74-106.

circle recalls the secrecy and exclusive nature of mystery cults. She could further have acted as a mystagogue leading initiates into some kind of esoteric knowledge or as a hierophant revealing the goddess in an mimetic act. The appearance of the Great Harlot-goddesses (as I suggest) in a vision of Rev 17 could have been a parody of the epiphany of a goddess in a mystery rite. There, an angel akin in role to a mystagogue explains the mystery of the vision to John (ch. 9, §2 (C)).

I further suggest here that an anti pagan-cultic stance is present in both Revelation and the Kings narrative at the thematic level. Both contexts also involve a 'Jezebel'. The Elijah-Baal contests in 1 Kgs 18-19 and 2 Kgs 10:18-28 form the backdrop to the anti Jezebelian-Ahab polemic in the Kings narrative (1 Kgs 18-22 and 2 Kgs 9-10). In Revelation, we similarly see Elijah and pseudo-Elijah figures. The narrative also contains an anti pagan-cultic stance, such as the polemic against beast-worship (14:9a) and the syncretistic dealings of Jezebel. The two witnesses of the Jesus-camp have power over rain/drought like Elijah (11:6; cf. 1 Kgs 18:41-45); while the 'beast from the land' of the Satanic trio is capable of calling fire from heaven (13:13; cf. 1 Kgs 18:36-38). We see the anti pagan-cultic motif in the Kings narrative subsumed in the intertextual layers of the 'visions',<sup>1232</sup> which in turn acts as a backdrop to the polemic against the prophetess Jezebel in the 'letters'.

I have argued that the web of associations between the 'Jezebels' and the Great Harlot goes beyond the surface level of the texts involved. Richard Hays writes about subtleties involved in intertextual reading:

When a literary echo links the text in which it occurs to an earlier text, the figurative effect of the echo can lie in the unstated or suppressed... points of resonance between the two texts....Allusive echo functions to suggest to the reader that text B should be understood in light of a broad interplay with text A, encompassing aspects of A beyond those explicitly echoed.<sup>1233</sup>

The reader is then placed, in Hays' words, 'within a field of whispered or unstated correspondences'.<sup>1234</sup> In our study, besides broad social-historical contexts

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<sup>1232</sup> See a study of intratextual allusions to Elijah in the depiction of the 'beast from the land'/'false prophet' in Duff, 120-23, and an allusion of the 'beast from the land' to the prophetess Jezebel in Duff, 124-25. For Elijah and Moses as types alluded to in the figures of the two witnesses (11:3-12), see Beale, 582-85.

<sup>1233</sup> Hays, *Echoes*, 20.

<sup>1234</sup> R. Hays, 20.

surrounding the depiction of the three characters are being interplayed, subtle parts of their constructs and texts (inherent allusions, connotations and overtones) contribute to the web of associations. To cite an example, it is interesting to see that all three characters are depicted as goddesses or goddess representatives. The prophetess Jezebel was a false spokeswoman in the church of Thyatira for the Christian God; in the mysteries she could be involved in her guild/association, she might have played the role of a mystagogue or hierophant. Queen Jezebel, in her depiction as the ‘woman at the window’, could have been depicted as Astarte, and probably took on a cultic role as Asherah’s representative. Likewise, the Great Harlot takes on the faces of popular Graeco-Roman goddesses.

In addition, the author of Revelation is seen to adopt both explicit and hidden polemic against the prophetess Jezebel. There is explicit polemic in the ‘letters’. There, ‘Jezebel’ is a named opponent. In the ‘vision narrative’ (chs. 4-22), we detect a hidden polemic against her behind the face of a Great Harlot. Yairah Amit writes perceptively that ‘hidden polemic’ occurs

when its subject is not explicitly mentioned, or when it is not mentioned in the expected, conventional formulation. Through various hints, the reader is left with the feeling that a double effort has been made within the text: on the one hand—to conceal the subject of the polemic, that is, to avoid its explicit mention; on the other—to leave certain traces within the text...that through various means will lead the reader to the hidden subject of the polemic.<sup>1235</sup>

The concealing and hinting is observed in the vision of the harlot-on-beast. The author describes the Great Harlot as a ‘mystery’ (17:5) and yet provides clues to her identity and that of her associate (17:7). The Great Harlot is not named ‘Jezebel’, nor for that matter ‘Rome’, but subtle hints in her depiction help a perceptive reader to elicit a web of interconnections with various oppressors and seducers of the churches. The focus of Part Three is limited to the polemic against a prophetic seducer.

Ultimately, there is much more to be done for a study of polemic in Revelation. The thesis has just attempted two things: (1) to understand the contexts (circumstances or issues at hand) that called for a polemic against the so-called

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<sup>1235</sup> Yairah Amit, *Hidden Polemics* (trans. Jonathan Chipman; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2000), 93. The volume provides valuable insights to how polemic works in OT narratives, but some categories are seen to be applicable to the NT.

‘Jews’ and a prophetess named ‘Jezebel’; and (2) to read the polemic against ‘Jezebel’ from a certain angle elicited by the text. In the process, background contexts are also uncovered to allow one to grasp the elusive images in Revelation. Echoing the words of the introduction, it is hoped that a reasonable reading of the text’s ‘potentiality’ is achieved in this thesis.

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